



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

### **DE-RADICALIZATION OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN THE UK**

by

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June 2009

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**DE-RADICALIZATION OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN THE UK**

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines why and how Islamists' message of radicalization spread like a social contagion among UK Muslim communities during the 1990s. The thesis hypothesizes that a small number of Islamists, with smartly contextualized ideas, given a receptive environment, can spread their influence rapidly.

Borrowing from Social Movement Theory and other works, this thesis elaborates how, through word-of-mouth and interpersonal communications, a relatively small number of people can successfully initiate a social epidemic of religious extremism. By following simple rules of marketing, Islamists made their message stickier.

To counter radicalization, the study suggests a paradigm shift: instead of countering the Islamists on theological grounds, reinvigoration of "family" is proposed as an all-in-one counter-radicalization tool that would remove social strains, hamper Islamists' mobilization mechanisms, and trump their teaching of propagating message based on cultivated *familiarity*.

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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND**

As I speak, terrorists are methodically and intentionally targeting young people and children in this country. They are radicalizing, indoctrinating and grooming young, vulnerable people to carry out acts of terrorism. This year, we have seen individuals as young as 15 and 16 implicated in terrorist-related activity.<sup>1</sup>

These were the warning bells being rung by Jonathan Evan (MI5 Chief) in a rare public speech in Manchester, England, in 2007.

Today, people have started calling Muslims' radicalization in the UK a bell-weather for Europe in terms of counter-terrorism. The number of attacks in the UK in the last few years bears testimony to this fact: "Today, the home-grown terrorists in [the] UK have become a major threat. There are a growing number of people from the UK who are willing to carry out attacks, or who have tried, but failed. At the same time, support and sympathy for extremists has also been increasing."<sup>2</sup> In June 2007, the country's threat level was raised to "critical," the highest of five possible levels, meaning a terrorist attack was expected imminently.<sup>3</sup> It remained "critical" for a month. Yet, once the threat level was reduced to "severe," this still meant that an attack was highly likely.<sup>4</sup> Since 2001, the police and security services have disrupted over a dozen attempted plots in

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<sup>1</sup> Press Association, "Children Being groomed to Carry out Terrorist Attacks in Britain, Spy Chief Warns," *International Herald Tribune*, November 5, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Silke, "The Psychology of Terrorist Radicalization," Report of a workshop on "Radicalization: Foresight and Warning," organized by The Centre of Excellence for National Security and Global Future Forum, Singapore, 2-4 February 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Press Association, "Terror Threat Level Now 'Critical,'" *The Guardian*, June 30, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

the UK.<sup>5</sup> The problem has assumed additional importance as radicalized Muslims communities have become a major threat internationally.<sup>6</sup>

Why and how have the Muslims in the UK grown radicalized to this extent? There are several drivers of this home-grown terrorism. The UK's domestic and foreign policies significantly contribute to it. Most terrorist recruits, especially second and third generation British Muslims, have felt compelled to support or partake in terrorist activities as a response to relative deprivation and social problems such as marginalization and discrimination.<sup>7</sup> British foreign policy contributes to a sense of alienation among young Muslims, and this interacts with and reinforces domestic sources of discontent. "Specific causes cited were bias towards Israel vis-à-vis Palestinians; non-action on Kashmir and Chechnya; and 'active oppression' in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the wider GWOT."<sup>8</sup>

The consequences—whether we speak in terms of terrorism, the law and order situation, religious extremism, or intolerance—are derivative of a process called "radicalization." In this thesis, radicalization is defined narrowly as: "the reasons for, and the processes through which people engage in terrorist activities."<sup>9</sup> For this study, the focus will be on the process by which Muslims, or converts, become "radicalized"—that is, the process by which they adopt attributes and beliefs that later lead to direct and indirect involvement in terrorist activities.

The general study of religious radicalization tends to either oversimplify the process by stressing single factor explanations, or to overemphasize the

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<sup>5</sup> The Home Office UK, "The UK's Strategy for Countering International Terrorists," Published in March 2009, <http://www.ProQuest.org/> (accessed April 22, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> "CIA Warns Barack Obama that British Terrorists are the Biggest Threat to the US," *Telegraph.co.uk*, February 7, 2009, <http://www.ProQuest.org/> (accessed December 28, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Silke, "The Psychology of Terrorist Radicalization," 8.

<sup>8</sup> Brendan O'Duffy, "Radical Atmosphere: Explaining Jihadist Radicalization in the UK," *Political Science & Politics*, January 2008, 37.

<sup>9</sup> Petter Nesser, "How Does Radicalization Occur in Europe?" Presentation given at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Inter-Agency Radicalization Conference, hosted by US Department of Homeland Security, Washington DC, July 10, 2006.

complexity of the phenomenon and arrive at the pessimistic conclusion that it is impossible to identify “a typical terrorist” and typical ways of becoming a terrorist.<sup>10</sup> Both of these views are too extreme. Radicalization is a process; individuals do not typically awake with a sudden perception that drives them to join a radical Islamic group. Indeed, they experience an often extensive socialization process that includes exposure to movement ideas, debate and deliberation, and even experimentation with alternative groups. Only when an individual is convinced that he/she has found the group that represents the “true” version of Islam is he or she likely to join.<sup>11</sup>

What causes do radical groups mobilize around, and when do these causes resonate for potential recruits? *Social Movement Theory (SMT)* offers a way to study the critical factors and has been applied in a number of historical studies of leftist and nationalist terrorism. It conceives social movements and their violent subgroups as rational actors, driven by an agenda and a set of distinct goals. Social networks, according to *SMT*, are the key vehicle for transmission of grievances, for recruitment, and for mobilization. To examine the process of radicalization through *SMT*, all structural factors, group processes, and individual motivations are to be linked in an integrated analytical framework. According to Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, this can be done by looking at different approaches that exist within *SMT*, i.e., *Strain Theory*, *Resources Mobilization Theory*, and *Framing Theory*.<sup>12</sup>

*Strain Theory* typically focuses on external strains in and on society that create a psychological sense of isolation and impotence among the populace in the face of broad societal changes. Joining a social movement provides an outlet

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<sup>10</sup> Nesser, “How Does Radicalization Occur in Europe?”

<sup>11</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam,” <http://www.ProQuest.org/> (accessed January 23, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Anja Dalgaard Nielsen, “Studying Violent Radicalization in Europe I – The Potential Contribution of Social Movement Theory,” Working Paper for Danish Institute for International Studies Number 2008/2, 2, [http://www.diis.dk/graphics/Publications/WP2008/WP08-2\\_Studying\\_Violent\\_Radicalization\\_in\\_Europe\\_I\\_-\\_The\\_Potential\\_Contribution\\_of\\_Social\\_Movement\\_Theory.pdf](http://www.diis.dk/graphics/Publications/WP2008/WP08-2_Studying_Violent_Radicalization_in_Europe_I_-_The_Potential_Contribution_of_Social_Movement_Theory.pdf) (accessed February 2, 2009).

and alleviates the experience of psychological strain. However, critics of this theory point out that a strain is only a psychological coping mechanism and is not always a sufficient causal factor for explaining social movements. For that, we bring into focus *Resource Mobilization Theory*, which helps us understand how intermediate variables translate strain and discontent into political action.<sup>13</sup>

*Resource Mobilization Theory* establishes for us how movements actively engage in garnering support and enlarging their constituency, and how social networks and micro-level organizations, such as mosques, schools, and religious organizations, define and disseminate grievances. *Resource Mobilization Theory's* focus on social networks as vehicles for recruitment explains some of the processes and the structure of a movement's growth, but it cannot account for the interpersonal processes that occur once recruiters and constituents engage with potential recruits. Although both *Strain Theory* and *Resource Mobilization Theory* elaborate the causal and functional attributes of any social phenomenon like radicalization, one finds them unable to explain the extent to which movements manage to explain and promote their cause(s) in terms that resonate with their potential constituency. To understand these processes it is necessary, according to the critics, to place more emphasis on the socio-psychological interpretation of grievances.<sup>14</sup>

This leads us to the third approach—*Framing Theory*. *Framing Theory* focuses on the social production and dissemination of meaning and on how individuals come to conceptualize themselves as a collectivity. The concept of “frame” relies on the work of sociologist Erving Goffman and refers to an individual's worldview or “schemata of interpretation,” consisting of values (notions about right and wrong) and beliefs (assumptions about the world, attributes of things, and mechanisms of causation). A frame helps an individual make sense of and organize his or her experience, and guide his or her action. Key to mobilization, according to this perspective, is whether the movement's

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<sup>13</sup> Nielsen, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

version of the “reality” resonates with or can be made to resonate for the movement’s potential constituency. Some scholars have referred to this process as “frame alignment”—the emergence of congruence between an individual’s and an organization’s interests, values, and beliefs.<sup>15</sup>

Taken together, these approaches to SMT provide an effective framework for understanding the process of radicalization among Muslims in the UK. There is a common assumption that the process of radicalization started in the 1990s and that, within almost 10–12 years, its message had spread throughout the UK at quite an impressive speed. What might be those factors that helped tip off the Islamists’ ideas so that they proliferated so quickly? Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point* offers a causal explanation. Borrowing from Gladwell’s three laws—the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor, and the Power of Context—will help us dissect the process of radicalization, as well as offering insight into how Islamists carry out their persuasion campaign and spread their radical ideas among the UK’s Muslim communities. It is expected that with a more enhanced understanding of the radicalization process, we can better plan a more effective strategy to reverse the tide of radicalization, not solely by taking preventative measures, but also by going on the offensive and disseminating moderate ideas in innovative ways.

## **B. SCOPE AND PURPOSE**

The purpose of this qualitative study will be to analyze the proliferation/spread of radical Islamization in the British Muslim Community, which started around 1990 and is still alive, though there may be less fervor associated with it today than several years ago. Besides native Muslims, the thesis will consider all major Muslim diasporas in the UK. For an inductive analysis, Ed Husain’s *The Islamist* will be used as the main case study. Relevant input acquired about British-based Muslims will also be cited to substantiate findings drawn from *The Islamist*. In its later chapters, the thesis will examine the

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<sup>15</sup> Nielsen, 6-10.

feasibility of reversing the tide based on a model derived in earlier chapters of the thesis. This research is expected to be beneficial to everyone concerned about radicalization.

### **C. RESEARCH APPROACH**

This study will provide a conceptual framework for understanding the proliferation of radicalization in the Muslim community in the UK. The framework will be derived by using Ed Husain as an ideal type/archetype for analytical purposes. Common pathways identified through using his and other accounts will then be validated given the information available about known Muslim terrorists killed or apprehended in the UK.

To evolve a counter-strategy to violent extremism, the Muslim community has to develop a stronger message. What is needed is an idea that not only can change the general mindset, but which borrows from social phenomena such as fashions, fads, trends, and revolutionary ideas. Malcolm Gladwell's book, *The Tipping Point*, provides useful hints about the environment in which a message can tip the general mood, and how the message should be packaged and passed through word-of-mouth via social networks. Conceptual notions about spreading "new ideas" as "innovations" are borrowed from Everett M. Rogers' *Diffusion of Innovations*.

### **D. THESIS OUTLINE**

Chapter II, "A Case Study – *The Islamist*, How Radical Islam is Spread in the UK," will discuss and analyze *The Islamist*. I will pay special attention to highlight what is so typical about Ed Husain's case that his account can be used to describe pathways toward radicalization.

Chapter III, "Modeling and Corroborating the Radicalization Path," will model the generalized pathways toward radicalization. The model will be analyzed and supported by using information available from different studies

about Islamists in the UK. Chapter III pulls together a good portion of the literature concerning Muslim radicalization in the UK and sets the stage for the rest of the study.

Chapter IV, “Proliferation of Radicalists’ Ideas in the UK,” examines the radicalization process through the lens of Gladwell’s theory regarding *tipping points*. In applying Gladwell’s laws, I will be treating the proliferation of Islamists’ ideas as a social phenomenon.

Chapter V, “De-radicalization and Spreading Moderate Ideas,” borrows from Everett M. Rogers’ theory of the “diffusion of innovation.” This chapter explores how we can reverse the tide of radicalization in the UK. Can we proliferate our ideas to support moderation and religious tolerance based on Gladwell’s theory of tipping points and borrowing from Rogers’ insight?

Chapter VI, “Conclusion,” summarizes the takeaways from this study. It is followed by the appendix and the bibliography.

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## **II. A CASE STUDY: *THE ISLAMIST*—HOW RADICAL ISLAM SPREAD IN THE UK**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The London attacks of July 2005, in which four young, apparently unremarkable British Muslim men killed 52 people in Western Europe's first suicide bombings, were followed by the incident of May 2007, in which five British-born Muslims were convicted of plotting to blow up targets like a shopping center and a nightclub using 600 kilograms of ammonium nitrate. These events raised a heated debate in the British press: how did the UK get to a position whereby MI5 has to deal with home-grown terrorism?

Is this the result of a sense of disenfranchisement that was so common during the 1990s in the UK, or is it a consequence of an identity crisis, a common phenomenon experienced by many Muslim immigrants in London? Another factor that draws attention is violence against Muslims in Bosnia, Palestine, and Kashmir, which may have brought the religious identity problem to the forefront for young Muslims, setting up conditions for the radicalization of differences.

Ed Husain's book, *The Islamist*, helps us to systematically trace how the idea of radicalization in the UK Muslim community spread and mushroomed. As we will see, his home environment helped tilt his biases toward religion, where he found answers to his identity crisis by believing himself to be part of the global Muslim community. Attachment to this idea forced him to rebel against his parents and become a member of Hizb ut-Tahrir. He worked for the organization, preached its theological ideology and, in the process of "culturing" himself, became radicalized. Nevertheless, his intelligence and sensitivity with regard to what he knew to be right eventually led him to return full circle from Islamist alienation back to his family and tolerant mystical Islam. The real stickiness about Ed Husain's personal journey is the fact that it not only offers us a potential pattern that, if does not fit all, at least fits most Muslims who take a path toward

radicalization, but it also reveals the broad contours of this phenomenon, giving us a framework through which to plan a reversal strategy.

## **B. ED HUSAIN'S CHILDHOOD**

Ed Husain belonged to a lower middle class family whose founding members arrived in England only in 1961. His father was born in British India, his mother in East Pakistan; he considered himself, though born in England, an Indian. He was the eldest of four, with a younger brother and twin sisters. He received his early education from Sir William Burrough Primary School, which he recalls almost as an extension of his house: "the teachers would often visit my parents and I remember going to Ms Powlesland's house to pick cherries in her garden."<sup>16</sup> However, he also states that growing up "British" in the 1980s was not easy. In East London where he lived, the atmosphere outside on the streets presented a sharp contrast to the warmth of home. Shaven-headed tattooed thugs hurling insults like, "Paki, Paki f----- off back home," were common.<sup>17</sup>

Ed Husain, in his childhood, was a soft-spoken kid. During his days at Sir William Burrough School, he experienced two incidents that left indelible impressions. The first incident involved one of his teachers who, while admonishing him, sarcastically remarked, "where is your Allah now, eh? Where is he? Can't he help you?" Husain writes that, though he could not understand the context of these remarks even then, he made out that they had something to do with Islam.<sup>18</sup> The second incident that he describes conveys an "unspoken appreciation of its [British] values of fairness and equality." He was in the school playground when he fell off a bike and cut his chin.<sup>19</sup> He was immediately taken for first aid and then to his home by another teacher, Ms. Cherie. Her gesture of love, care, and affection stayed permanently with Husain.

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<sup>16</sup> Ed Husain, *The Islamist* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 5.

Husain received his secondary school education at Stepney Green School, which was predominantly an Asian boy's school. As he says, the "single reason of his admission there was his parents' strong belief in single-sex education."<sup>20</sup> However, he personally never liked going there, hardly had friends, and consequently became withdrawn and very introverted. He recalls that he was never able to relate to most of his classmates. In general, he found school to be rife with incidents of indiscipline.<sup>21</sup>

### C. RELIGIOUS HOME ENVIRONMENT

At home, Husain belonged to an extremely close family.<sup>22</sup> His father, while at home, used to listen regularly to the news and his concern with current affairs left a profound mark on Husain. But, his father's intellectual preoccupations were not limited solely to history and politics. A key part of his life, from a very young age, had been religion. He was a committed follower of a famous *pir*, or spiritual master from the India-Bangladesh border region (Sylhet), named Shaikh Abd ul-Latif.<sup>23</sup> Husain grew up calling Shaikh Abd ul-Latif "Grandpa." Husain used to accompany Shaikh Latif to different places, whenever Grandpa visited Britain. Husain learned at home from his father that, "spiritual seekers did not gain knowledge from books alone, but learned from what he called *Suhbah*, or companionship."<sup>24</sup>

Husain considered Grandpa's *suhbah* an honor and blessing for him, as it made his parents proud. He was 14 years of age when he started going to *dhikar* meetings at Brick Lane Mosque, which he found very spiritual. He also participated in similar gatherings, called *mawlid*, organized at his home, where he

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<sup>20</sup> Husain.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

used to recite from the Quran before Grandpa addressed the participants.<sup>25</sup> Closeness to Grandpa increased Husain's prestige not only among his peers and family, but in his own eyes as well. He not only learned about religion, but also politics under Grandpa's influence. It was in Shaikh Latif's company that he first heard individuals such as "Mawdudi" being severely criticized.<sup>26</sup>

All this, however, did not help Husain much at school, where he remained even more of a misfit. But, one important thing that transpired was that his peers' approval no longer mattered to him. He became resolute. His keenness to learn more about faith increased, and he also started taking a religious education class at school. The other student who joined him was Abdullah Falik. Husain describes that though their teacher, Mrs. Rainey, "was of the Church of England, [that] did not stop us from trying to convert her."<sup>27</sup> He categorizes this phase of his religious learning at school as different from the education he received at home. Before this, "Grandpa and my parents had taught me by setting an example, by living faith. Mrs. Rainey taught us with books."<sup>28</sup> Husain's parents taught him that Islam was a path that would draw him closer to God. However, in books, he came across an alternate idea known as "Islamic politics"—the need for a state where Islam was a system of government.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, he slowly started appreciating the efforts of several organizations that were dedicated to the creation of a truly Islamic state.

#### **D. EAST LONDON MOSQUE—SEEKING NEW IDENTITY**

Husain's friendship with Abdullah Falik also influenced him. He considered Falik "a better Muslim, because he was also involved with the Young Muslim Organization (YMO) and spent much of his spare time helping events at East

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<sup>25</sup> Husain, 14.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 21.

London Mosque.”<sup>30</sup> Together, Husain and Abdullah Falik started to assert a new identity: as young London-born Muslim students. During this transformational period, they looked to symbols of distinctive identity. One fad they indulged in was to wear a black and white checkered scarf: “Bedouin headgear conveniently appropriated as a symbol of Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation.”<sup>31</sup> Sensing his parents’ disapproval, Husain withheld from them any information about YMO and East London Mosque. As he puts it, “had my father caught me snorting cocaine he would have found it in him to forgive me, counsel me. But I knew he would not be able to tolerate any association with those he considered enemies of God: Mawdudi’s followers, the activists at the East London Mosque.”<sup>32</sup>

Since his childhood, Husain had always offered his prayers at Brick Lane. East London was considered a rival mosque. East London Mosque, throughout the late 1980s, had remained the site of conflict between rival factions of *Jamat e-Islami* (JI) in Britain. Husain writes that his father considered JI “a sinister political organization [that] use[s] Islam as a political tool and demean[s] the Prophet’s original teachings.”<sup>33</sup> However, Husain’s friend, Falik, persuaded him to meet some people from the organization and decide for himself whether it was a political or a religious organization. Husain recalled that the first time he went to East London Mosque he felt confused, as if he was “stepping inside enemy territory.” However, he received VIP treatment. Everyone he met took an interest in him, his studies, his family, and his future. He writes that he felt comfortable among them as “I [he] could relate to them...they seemed like worthy role models: English-speaking, educated, and rooted in faith.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Husain, 23.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 28.

Back at school, Husain and Falik stopped visiting Mrs. Rainey, who was sidelined by family commitments. Instead, they spent more time at the East London Mosque, hanging out with Muslims from YMO and Islamic Forum Europe. Husain started to attend meetings at the Fieldgate street offices of YMO. During those meetings he became familiar with the organization and its leaders. Among those who influenced him most was an individual named Siraj, a Bangladeshi who gave him small gifts and memorabilia: “as a youth worker he [Siraj] acted as my mentor...As weeks passed by he gave me lifts home and took an interest in those I loved most: my parents.”<sup>35</sup> However, no one tried to openly recruit Husain into the YMO.

Until then, Husain’s parents did not know about his activities at YMO. To convince his parents that YMO was all right, Husain sought Siraj’s help. He asked Siraj about JI’s motives but, to his surprise and satisfaction, Siraj adopted an “open door policy” and criticized Mawdudi. He said, “we don’t consider Mawdudi a perfect [sic], he made mistakes. You can disagree with Mawdudi, and yet join the Islamic movement.”<sup>36</sup> By then, Husain also started participating in YMO promotion activities: producing T-shirts, putting up posters in Muslim areas of London, and persuading parents to encourage their children to attend YMO events. He also joined YMO *taleemi jalsa*, which was organized in a large hall adjoining the mosque. About 50 young men sat on the floor in a rough circle, with two men serving as discussion leaders. The speakers were mostly young undergraduates (young undergraduates were a rarity in Tower Hamlets where Husain lived). Participating in such activities began to give Husain a sense of accomplishment, “Falik and I were now openly known as brothers from YMO. After 5 years, I had found both a friend and a cause to which I belonged.”<sup>37</sup>

At the weekly *taleemi jalsas*, a main focus of the talks was, “Islam is a source of all knowledge. Before Islam the world was in darkness. Today, the

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<sup>35</sup> Husain, 30.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 33.

west is proud of democracy, but where did it come from? The first democracy in the world was in Medina, when the Muslims elected caliphs in free elections.”<sup>38</sup> Husain describes how this unquestioning assertion of Islam’s, or more precisely Islamists’, political superiority over the west, stayed with him. At YMO another theme was “striving together to create a true Islamic society in the world.”<sup>39</sup> Yet another compelling theme was based on Mawdudi’s conviction that the struggle for removing disbelieving rulers and creating a society ruled by “the rightness” was the only “means left to please God.”<sup>40</sup>

Besides the *jalsas*, there were also certain mandatory readings for all Islamist movement activists. YMO provided Husain with a daily routine with a host of activities that he had to report on everyday: the number of prayers he had read in congregation at a mosque, how much of the Quran he had recited, how many pages of Islamic books he had read, how much time he had spent with family, and how many hours he had targeted for recruitment. At the *taleemi jalsa*, the individual who had accomplished the most during the preceding week was publicly praised.<sup>41</sup>

At the age of 16, Husain had no white friends. His world was entirely Asian, fully Muslim. Nor was he a mere Muslim, like all the others he knew; he was better, superior. While his fellow teenagers were smuggling pornography into their rooms, his contraband consisted of books written by Islamist ideologues. However, these were also testy times for Husain, as his parents were becoming seriously concerned about his sudden outburst of religious fervor. During this period, YMO members comforted him by saying, “this is the way God tests his servants...Ours is the work of prophets, and they were opposed by their families.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Husain.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 41.

Husain's father did engage him in long hours of debate and sermons, but by then he had become a staunch activist. Though he curtailed his activities for a time, he still maintained his daily routine sheet, and read bulletins issued by the JI. At one point his father gave him the ultimatum: "leave Mawdudi's Islamism or leave my house."<sup>43</sup> Husain decided to leave his family.

Husain turned to the mosque for support, which he received. In describing his feelings he writes, "deep down I wanted to go home, but that would be seen as backing down in the face of parental pressure. I had to win. The Islamist movement must prevail."<sup>44</sup> His intransigence succeeded, and after a few days, his parents forgave him on his terms: he was free to do as he pleased. Henceforth, with his parents defeated, there was no one to stop him.

## **E. ISLAMIST ACTIVISM AND DAWA**

Readings and discussions inside the mosque and at various meetings were not just about abstract concepts. There were prescribed readings by Mawdudi and Syed Qutb. In the writings they read, Mawdudi advocates gradual change and is even, on occasion, ready to make concessions to the West. In contrast, Qutb preaches an all-out war. The bottom line for Islamists, Husain discovered, was a popular phrase borrowed from the Muslim Brotherhood, "Islam is the solution"—"*al-Islam huwa al-hall*." To ordinary Muslims, this had a certain resonance. The stories of martyrdom that reached them from Afghanistan about jihad against the Soviets helped them feel connected.

In short, Husain and his new friends learned how to deploy religion to manipulate the emotions of their fellow Muslims. At Tower Hamlets College, for instance, a group of student Islamists came up with the idea of organizing high profile events at the main campus.<sup>45</sup> The advertising technique they adapted was

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<sup>43</sup> Husain, 44.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>45</sup> Husain was attending Tower Hamlet College at this time. He became very active as member of the College Islamic Society. Very quickly, based on his dedication by a secret ballot he was selected president. Ibid., 59.



the same one used by automobile manufacturers when launching a new model: initially the product was hidden beneath a white sheet, and only slowly unveiled before a curious public. Curiosity made fliers about the “Islamic society” a subject of conversation in every class. The provocative posters Husain and his fellow Islamists made caused an uproar on campus. However, this too, worked for them; their student event, billed as the largest in the college’s history, was a phenomenal success.

As society president, Husain headed a 10-member committee, which met once a week, planned events, and then critically evaluated the successes and failures of every gathering. He and the committee ran the Islamic Society like a military operation.<sup>46</sup> They had a chain of command and a clear vision of where they were headed. Husain was by then promoting Islamism every day—at college, in his private life, and in public with the YMO. As a student president, he also had frequent meetings with the senior YMO President and through him received instructions from YMO headquarters.

Husain’s area of responsibility for *dawa* was Tower Hamlets College. Husain devised a strategy for recruitment of new students. Every new entrant was welcomed, and with their very first contact, received literature. Husain and his supporters also started extending help to students who came to them with their problems. Throughout the college, Husain and his circle, were viewed as activists who knew what they were doing in life.

Slowly, YMO became aggressive in its outlook. It demanded and received a room for prayers in college, which it used for organizing and rallying Muslim students. As YMO grew in strength, Husain and his fellow leaders started blackmailing the college management. Similarly, they stopped Muslims students from going to discos, not by force but by playing on their sensitivities of guilt,

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<sup>46</sup> Husain, 56.

shame and humiliation. Consequently, within six months YMO had effectively changed the entire atmosphere of the college.<sup>47</sup>

Commenting on the social ethos among Britain's young Muslims, Husain explains, "the more extroverted we became in our perceived expression of Islam, the more highly valued we were among our peers."<sup>48</sup> YMO did intellectually manipulate certain teachings. For example, "courting and dating" were considered morally degenerate. Therefore, most YMO members found partners of the opposite gender under the pretext of marriage. Knowing that a strict ban on this might reduce recruitment, the YMO activists cited scripture from early Islam to prove that a suitor could approach a potential partner directly, agree to the terms of agreement, and then ask a woman's parents for her hand in marriage.<sup>49</sup>

#### **F. QUEST FOR PURE ISLAM AND DAYS IN HIZB UT-TAHRIR**

In order to propagate YMO's ideas Husain, as president of the student YMO, arranged for good public speakers. "We invited them [speakers from JMAS and Hizb ut-Tahrir] often because they were mostly dynamic speakers, able to stir a crowd and plant genuine interest in Islam."<sup>50</sup> These speakers not only came to talk, but also flooded the college with books, which preached Wahabism.

Husain noticed that, under the influence of Wahabism, several of his fellow students headed to Afghanistan for jihad training in response to Quranic verses urging Muslims to rise up against violence.<sup>51</sup> In early 1993, the Balkans crisis added fuel to people's hatred of the West. Videos depicting the ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims had a great impact on the students. They started

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<sup>47</sup> Husain, 63.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>50</sup> In hindsight, he found himself regretting this decision, "for they planted ideas among the Islamized students that led those students to reject them." Ibid., 71.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 73.

collecting money in order to help the victims but very quickly moved to the idea of jihad as a simplified answer to the slaughter. During this period, Husain writes that he began to become disgruntled with the YMO due to its preoccupation with only the Bangladeshi community, its lack of intellectual vigor, and its complete failure to provide an answer to the Bosnian issue.<sup>52</sup> Husain was clearly not alone.

The organization that hijacked the situation, Husain says, was Hizb ut-Tahrir. Hizb's membership quickly grew; it had a clear methodology for dealing with all of the problems of the world. From Bosnia to the Gulf War, from the poverty in Africa to the high crime rate in the West, it offered solutions. Unlike YMO, Hizb likewise claimed, "If there was an Islamic state, a caliphate, then Bosnia would have not happened."<sup>53</sup> Hizb promised, "[to] redistribute the wealth of the future Islamic State." Not only did Hizb step up its activities during the Bosnian war, but TV news bulletins—200,000 people lost their lives in the conflict, millions more were made homeless—reinforced its message. Given such an environment of helplessness, slogans like "Jihad for Bosnia" had a phenomenal effect.

It was mostly the second-generation British Muslims and converts who were seduced by Omar Bakri, also known as the "Tottenham Ayatollah." His mastery of the Arabic language and his ready and seemingly relevant quotes from the Quran and other sources attracted the young British Muslims. Moreover, a particularly effective stratagem used by Hizb ut-Tahrir was to convince its members that "working towards establishing an Islamic State is an Islamic obligation, at par with daily prayers and Hajj."<sup>54</sup> Impressed by Omar Bakri's speeches and practical solutions to the Bosnian conflict, Husain decided to join Hizb. Hizb targeted Tower Hamlets with a steely determination, as this was Britain's most densely populated Muslim area.

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<sup>52</sup> Husain, 76.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 82.

Hizb leaders accused JI and the Muslim Brotherhood of having strayed from the ideas set out in Qutb's *Milestone*.<sup>55</sup> Hizb's scripture was based on teachings by Nabhani, who argued for complete destruction of the existing political order, and its replacement by the *Khilafat system*. To achieve this, Hizb preached a three-part strategy aimed at taking political power: secret stage, open stage, and *nusrrat* [victory]. As Husain got inside Hizb, he realized it was more secretive than he assumed with numerous cells of 5–8 members each.<sup>56</sup> He used to get a telephone call that would tell him who his *mushrif* was for the *halaqah* of the coming weekly gathering.

During the *halaqah* discussions, Hizb members never discussed trivial things. Their seriousness and commitment to the cause were judged by the level of sophistication and content of their questions. In fact, there was a group culture inside Hizb that no question should be asked unless it was relevant to their global aims. There was likewise a built-in culture of aggressive argumentation: “Never defend, always offend.”<sup>57</sup> Hizb members challenged the ideas of every other Muslim group, and even bullied speakers to adopt their arguments or face confrontation.

From 1992 to 1993, Hizb was given excessive coverage in the print media. As Husain writes, “nothing gave them [Hizb members] greater motivation than to hear our ideas being amplified in the national media, reaching new audiences of Muslims.”<sup>58</sup> Hizb numbers increased steadily as they attacked the West. Their leaflets cited the worst aspects of the West's social freedoms, its financial systems, and political immorality. All were evidence of the West's coming decline. Activists' discussion strategy was to obliterate Western ideas that controlled peoples' behavior or influenced their psyche and then supplant these with new ideas: Hizb ideas. Hizb addressed problems commonly

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<sup>55</sup> Husain, 89.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 103.

confronted by youth, such as 'sex, drugs and rock n roll,' race, and marriage (whether arranged or by love). During summer vacations, Hizb activities did not cease. Instead, when students returned to their homes, they were supposed to take Hizb concepts and ideas with them into the Muslim community.

At one stage, Omar Bakri was delivering as many as 29 lectures a week, both in private and public. However, unlike organizing in universities, mobilizing whole communities proved to be a more difficult task.<sup>59</sup> Activists were taught not to create a false sense that something had been achieved, especially since the achievement they were striving for was a radical shift in perception. Their goal was to politicize Muslim public opinion, to reconnect the *Ummah*, and forge it into one nation; the unfinished business of Vienna in 1683, when the Ottomans tried and failed to conquer Europe, had to be completed.

To take their ideas to the wider Muslim community, Hizb activists did just as they had done on campus. They avoided the name of Hizb ut-Tahrir, instead calling themselves the Muslim Unity Organization and launching local demonstrations across the UK to whip up Muslim fears: "Bosnia today, Britain tomorrow." They also tried to inculcate a sense of failing the *Ummah* on the part of Britain's relatively well-off Muslims, who saw themselves as remote from the problems of the Arab and Muslim world. They developed friendships with gangs of Muslim youth who hung out on street corners in the evenings. Hizb clerics like Omar Bakri also tried to drive a wedge between Muslims and the law. Within a decade, his policy of non-cooperation with *Kafir* legislation set many Islamists against the British police.

To maximize their influence, Hizb activists tried to gain access to regular Friday crowds at local community mosques. Often they were denied this privilege, as other organizations had already established their hold. Hizb responded with an innovation: if not allowed to speak inside the mosque, they

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<sup>59</sup> Husain, 112.

should canvass outside the mosque after Friday prayers.<sup>60</sup> Besides this, they also held demonstrations that would take them past major mosques in selected Muslims areas.<sup>61</sup> Throughout this process, the media gave Hizb much needed coverage. Other venues where Hizb hunted for ready-made crowds were *Tabligi Jamaat* weekly gatherings. There people came from across Britain. Hizb was able to make contacts and send them back to other cities buzzing with Hizb's ideas.

In other parts of the country, Hizb activists entered mosques through two avenues: as young Muslims returning from universities on break, wanting to talk about Islam, or through personal contacts they had among their large network of Asian "uncles," the *Beraderi*. Typically, the activists avoided elders and targeted instead the "junior followers in jeans and T-shirts." <sup>62</sup>

## **G. APPROACHING FANATICISM**

After a few years, Husain decided to move to Newham. Newham had an altogether different environment. It had a large Muslim population, but also a liberal smattering of people of other faiths, particularly Sikhs and Hindus. *Dawa* stalls were first used by Hizb there. On Saturday mornings, and occasionally at large meetings of other groups, the activists put up their table and displayed some of their most controversial leaflets, along with tapes inviting people to their meetings.<sup>63</sup>

As he moved to Newham, Husain's *halaqah* also changed. His new *halaqah* involved students from top universities in London. His *mushrif*, Amir Khan, was a medical student at Kings College London. In this *halaqah* they

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<sup>60</sup> Husain, 118.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 130.

talked about the “system of Islam” and discussed the constitution of the Islamic state, as they were convinced that very shortly there would be an announcement of the establishment of an Islamic state.

During this period, Husain began having doubts about where Islamists were heading.<sup>64</sup> He wondered whether the original Islamic political system was only a myth. In Nabhani’s so-called constitution, several articles under the section entitled “the social system,” looked problematic. Most importantly, women were forbidden to be in private with any man they might marry. He found this contrary to what most of the activists were doing. Slowly, as he started developing these doubts, Husain also observed that under peer pressure his freedom to ask questions was being limited. Nevertheless, he continued with Hizb.

In 1994, Hizb planned to emphasize a different theme. The previous year it had held demonstrations to attract attention to Bosnia, but this time Hizb activists were going to publicize an international conference to mark the official ending of the Ottoman Empire, which they referred to as the “Destruction of the Islamic State.” They started advertising early, seven months before the conference. They tried to create intense media interest in the event with billboards like, “Coming soon to a Country near You.” They put *Khilafat* stickers everywhere, prompting people to ask what *kilafat* was? Who was putting up the stickers?

Hizb activities started this campaign from known community centers, leafleted mosques, and sold tickets to their friends, families and neighbors.<sup>65</sup> Mohammad al-Masari, a famous Saudi dissident, whom the British government wanted to deport, was wheeled out at a press conference to give the impression that something big was about to happen in the Middle East. They also used the conference to launch English translations of Nabhani’s books, particularly his

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<sup>64</sup> Husain, 132.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 135.

revisionist historic book *The Islamic State*. But the conference, once it came, was a failure: Hizb received lot of media coverage, but attendance was minimal.

During this time, Husain developed a friendship with Majid Nawaz, who joined him at Newham for his A-Levels. Husain observed that, unlike him, Majid gained popularity very quickly and attributed this to his fashionable clothes, attitude, good looks, and street talk. Majid recruited contacts and made members of friends he met at the college canteen or even in the college library. Newham College had no prayer room, so Husain, Majid, and others used this fact to mobilize students, saying: “They slaughter us in Bosnia, expel us from our homes in Palestine, and refuse us a basic right to pray in Britain.”<sup>66</sup> As Hizb became popular at other college campuses, Newham community started taking an interest in what Hizb extremists were teaching. “We could, at an hour’s notice, gather a crowd of nearly a hundred at the main gate of the college.”<sup>67</sup>

Husain also met Saeed, a lanky black Brit who considered himself a macho man. Saeed told everyone that in case any *Kafir* messed with them to call him for help. Externally, Husain continued to exhibit signs of piety in order to maintain his standing among his target audience, but he was not an observant Muslim. On the personal level, he began to feel that his relationship with God had started to deteriorate.<sup>68</sup> Husain began to see that those canvassing on behalf of Islam, like Saeed, knew very little about the Quran. Husain felt that, “My life was consumed by fussy, inner confusion, a desire to dominate everything, and my abject failure to be a good Muslim. I started out on this journey wanting more Islam and ended up losing its essence.”<sup>69</sup>

During this time, Husain also developed a friendship with a Muslim girl named Faye. He found he and Faye shared the same heritage and social background, had a common interest in learning Arabic, and had a similar desire

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<sup>66</sup> Husain, 141.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 148.



to travel. He also saw that Faye was closer to God: she prayed regularly. When Husain proposed marriage to her, her condition to him was that they first complete their studies and pursue their careers. His friendship with Faye uplifted him from within.

One afternoon, an event happened that changed everything for Husain. A row developed between Christian Nigerians and Muslims over a pool table at the college. One of the Nigerians said offensive things and a Muslim student phoned Saeed, who turned up on the scene in no time. Saeed and the Nigerian confronted each other outside and the quarrel ended with Saeed thrusting his knife in the boy's chest. Perhaps he did this in self-defense, but he ended up murdering the boy nonetheless. Husain and Majid approached Omar Bakri to explain that Saeed had acted in self-defense and asked him to stand beside the College's Muslims. Instead Hizb issued a condemnation of what had happened, saying that Hizb was a non-violent party to the incident.

This incident had a great effect on Husain, who wrote "that murder, a direct result of Hizb ut-Tahrir's idea, served as a wake up call for me."<sup>70</sup>

## **H. DISENCHANTMENT WITH RADICALISTS' VIEW**

Just as Husain had become a member of Hizb over a period of time, his departure from the organization did not occur on a specified date. First, he dissociated himself from the *halaqah*. This was prompted by the taking of an innocent life, Omar Bakri's subsequent deceit, and Husain's horror when he realized how poisonous was the atmosphere he had helped create. He was frightened by where this all might lead.

Husain began to wonder whether Islam had anything at all to offer. He feared he had completely confused Islamism with Islam: to him they were one and the same. To find out what in actuality Islam meant, he decided to learn Arabic, but also feared that he would be taking steps that Islamists typically took:

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<sup>70</sup> Husain, 153.

going directly to the divine text without scholarly guidance, believing that with the mere understanding of language he could interpret what Muslim scholars had debated and discussed for centuries. “Indoctrination of Hizb was powerful and it was many years before I [Husain] was completely free of it.”<sup>71</sup>

Husain also switched universities. At the University of North London, he was helped by a British historian, Professor Denis Judd, in resolving some of his doubts about extremism. What struck him most was that professor Judd, despite being a non-Muslim, never expressed enmity or animosity toward Islam and Muslims. At this University, Husain also discovered that much of what Nabhani and Mawdudi had preached was in fact their own interpretation of Islam influenced by Marx, Hegel, and Rousseau. This revelation not only toppled Nabhani from his pedestal, but with him fell all of Hizb ut-Tahrir’s claims of political purity, intellectual superiority, deep thoughts, and the dressing up in religious terms of a political agenda born in the Middle East of the 1950s.

In his quest to learn more about his religion, Husain joined evening Arabic classes. There he came across another individual, Zahid Amin, an activist in the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB). One of ISB’s major attractions for Husain was its vehement stance against Hizb. As with the *talemmi jalsa* of YMO and the *halaqah* of Hizb, ISB had evening gatherings called *usrah*, which in Arabic means “family,” an idea borrowed from the Muslim Brotherhood. The *usrah* started with a recitation from the Quran, followed by commentary, a discussion about what everyone had read, and a meal. Husain’s *usrah* instructor was Abu Luqman, a Palestinian, trained by Sheikh Yasin and a member of Hamas. Despite knowing all this, Husain continued to attend. He was now leading a different kind of double life: “In private, he was a free thinker. Among Islamists he was a brother.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Husain, 156.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 171.

ISB proudly claimed that the UK considered it their gravest Islamist threat. Though Husain recognized that Islamists' inherent desire to confront and control also lurked within ISB, he did note some differences between it and Hizb. For instance, he listened to a speech by Hamza Yousaf Hanson who, in response to one question, went as far as to declare that there was "no such thing as an Islamic State."<sup>73</sup> Husain liked Hamza Yousaf's courage and his willingness to stand up for traditional Islam when every other Muslim organization had become dominated by the need to establish a "state." Nevertheless, over time he disassociated himself from them, too.

Increasingly, Husain wanted to lead a normal life. He voted in the 1997 elections and joined the Labor Party. He also applied for and got a job at HSBC. His hard work there earned him a good reputation, and he quickly started receiving promotions and raises. Islamism became a distant memory, as he busily built his career with no time for the underworld of mosques and marches; Bosnia seemed irrelevant.<sup>74</sup>

However, after a couple of years at HSBC, Husain again felt uncomfortable with the environment. Three questions that he learned in Hizb came back to him: Why am I here? Where am I heading? Where did I come from? Husain no longer believed in a God who wanted man to govern in his name. For him, God was beyond gender, limitation, and even conceptualization. He felt that God had been belittled by organized religion, particularly by literalist extremists of all persuasions. He admitted that "I was in search of spiritual solace, a meaning of my life, and whoever offered it would win my commitment."<sup>75</sup>

Husain's retreat was at once selfish and selfless, designed to benefit both himself and others. During this period, he vowed to commit himself generously to

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<sup>73</sup> Husain, 175.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 186.

the Quran. He turned towards *tasawwaf* or *Sufism*. He was increasingly motivated by the notion of turning inward, and attempted to cleanse his heart of feelings of anger, enmity, arrogance, envy, rancor, jealousy, and other vices that Sufis indicate distance humans from the truth and put us in conflict with creation.

Without a pure heart, worship is burdensome and tiring. Sufi-oriented scholars helped Husain anchor his soul after five years of political Islamism—which he increasingly viewed as a shallow, anger-ridden, aggression-fuelled form of political belief based on exploiting Islam’s adherents, but remote from Islam’s teachings. In Sufism, he finally found both hope and faith: “Islamism had now been completely flushed out me.”<sup>76</sup>

## **I. FINDINGS**

### **1. Identity Crisis**

**a)** Ed Husain, right from his childhood, suffered from an identity dilemma. His father was an Indian, mother a Bangladeshi, and he himself was born British.

**b)** Although the environment in which he was brought up displayed discriminatory tendencies, Husain recalls very little of these mainly due to his protected surroundings characterized by his parents and English teachers. Nevertheless, as he grew older he started noticing negative British attitudes toward Asians.

**c)** He remained within the Asian community and had no British friends during secondary school.

### **2. Home Environment and Initial Religious Grooming**

**a)** At home, Husain belonged to an extremely close family. His parents were extra-religious. They followed a spiritual master from “home” whom they greatly respected. One can get an indication of their respect from the fact that

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<sup>76</sup> Husain, 199.

Husain's parents asked him to call Shaikh Abdul-Latif "Grandpa," which is definitely not a common practice. The concept of religious mentor was in fact introduced to him at home. Over the next several years, Ed Husain developed a close association with Shaikh Latif.

**b)** At the age of 14, Husain started attending evening meetings that he found very spiritual. As a boy who was finding it difficult to adjust among his peers, we could say he sought comfort in these religious gatherings. Husain writes that his closeness to Grandpa increased his prestige not only among his peers and family, but in his own eyes.

**c)** Another significant thing that happened during this period was Husain's awareness of selected world affairs. Since childhood, he had observed his father's interest in world affairs, but he himself started taking an interest in current events at the age of 16 when Shaikh Latif asked him to monitor the First Gulf War. During this period, he started to realize non-Muslims' persecution/ill treatment of Muslims, and this left an indelible mark on him. Ed Husain writes that his parents taught him that Islam was a path that would draw him closer to God. As he developed a growing interest in religion, he volunteered for religious studies at school. He learned about religion through the available literature, which introduced him to "political Islam."

### **3. Recruitment and Activities at YMO**

**a)** Husain was put on a religious path by his parents, but as he grew he tried to be more independent. He was introduced to the YMO through his friend Falik.

**b)** Despite knowing that his parents would object, he went to the East London Mosque. He writes that he felt comfortable among members of YMO because he could relate to them and they looked, to him, to be worthy role models: English-speaking, educated, and rooted in faith. Until that time, his intent

was simple—to be the best among his colleagues. At school, he started to lead prayers and became actively involved in YMO activities.

c) Here Husain's contact with Siraj gives us some insight into how YMO attracts recruits. The first thing that enabled Husain to trust Siraj was the fact that Siraj was a Bangladeshi. Siraj gave Husain gifts and took an interest in his family, but never openly tried to recruit Husain. Siraj's prime modus operandi was to agitate Husain's mind through discussions and then give him religious literature that would mold Husain's mind. Meanwhile, Husain also joined YMO promotional activities, which included putting up posters and persuading parents to encourage their children to attend YMO events. As Husain undertook these small steps, he unwittingly grew more rigid in what he thought was right.

d) YMO also provided a different forum in the form of *taleemi jalsa*, where recruits would gather to discuss their activities. This was organized in such a way that Husain's involvement gave him a growing sense of accomplishment. *Taleemi jalsas* was not an abstract activity; the organization ensured that in all these meetings, the activists were being indoctrinated with certain themes: e.g., Islam is the source of all knowledge; the concept of democracy came from Islam; it is time for all Muslims to strive together to create a true Islamic society in the world; as a community Muslims must endeavor to remove disbelieving rulers; and, the Islamist movement must prevail.

e) At YMO, Husain was indoctrinated with certain specific religious teachings of Mawdudi and Syed Qutb that presented an Islamic manifesto—Islam is the solution. Husain and his colleagues deployed such phrases to manipulate the emotions of other followers. To ordinary Muslims, these phrases had a special resonance.

f) YMO promotion techniques followed typical commercial practices: e.g., create curiosity and provoke people to think about the issue and, only at a later stage, present a simplified solution. YMO activists advertised in targeted Muslim

areas and selected universities. Good public speakers were invited for talks that stirred the already curious crowd and planted a genuine interest in them about Islam.

**g)** YMO had predesignated areas for canvassing. Activists were encouraged to live in those communities and influence people by their personal example. However, during these influence campaigns activists kept in mind the cultural sensitivities of people, such as, “the more extrovert you become in your perceived expression of Islam, the more highly valued you were among your peers”.<sup>77</sup>

**h)** To ensure their teachings resonated among the masses, the YMO activists often used the declining condition of Muslims worldwide for justification. The Balkan crisis of 1993 provided an opportunity through which most of these organizations made many gains. Videos showing the ethnic cleaning of Muslims had an especially powerful impact on the students. In fact, it even affected Husain, who fell victim to his own devices and left YMO to join Hizb ut-Tahrir.

#### **4. Hizb ut-Tahrir—A Step Ahead in Seeking Religion**

**a)** Husain’s stay inside YMO taught him almost all the essential techniques that the Islamists employed for recruitment. What distinguished Hizb is that its members always had answers to Husain’s questions. Hizb was also more secretive and activists operated in small cells. Like *taleemi jalsa* in YMO, Hizb had *halqah*. However, discussion in *halqahs* never involved trivial things. Members considered themselves leaders who would help bring about the emergence of a Muslim State, which was just a matter of time.

**b)** Hizb was also media savvy. It often tried to come up with controversial comments that would get it media coverage. Husain writes that, while in Hizb, nothing gave members greater motivation than to hear their ideas being amplified in the national media, reaching a new audience of Muslims.

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<sup>77</sup> Husain, 67.

**c)** Hizb discussion strategy was to obliterate ideas that controlled people's behavior and supplant these with new ideas. At the organized talks, Hizb projected itself as having a much higher intellectual caliber than JI, YMO, or Islamic Forum Europe. The thing that impressed Husain the most was that whatever questions he asked, Hizb members always had answers. It addressed problems experienced by youth and used youth as its messengers who could then take its concepts into the Muslim community. British university campuses have been a fertile ground for this concept.

**d)** Unlike in the universities, Hizb found it very difficult to mobilize whole Muslim communities. Hizb tried to do this by creating a false sense among the masses that something was about to happen.

**e)** To avoid any backlash, Hizb operated under fake names like Muslim Unity Organization. These organizations held demonstrations, rallies, lectures and developed relationships with local Muslim gangs.

**f)** Hizb clerics tried to drive a wedge between Muslims and the British law. In Muslim areas where they were denied access to mosques, activists distributed leaflets, creating an atmosphere of activity and radicalism by flooding the streets just outside the mosques with their supporters.

**g)** Same Hizb activists, like Majid Nawaz, were able to gain popularity and make contacts due to their fashionable clothing, attitudes, good looks, and street talk.

**h)** Hizb took advantage of all inter-personal and word-of-mouth contacts it had available to it.

## **5. Expectation Unfulfilled—De-radicalization**

**a)** After staying in Hizb, Husain left for the same reasons he had joined—to ardently follow a more religious path and seek bounty from God. After spending some time in Hizb, Husain started to feel his life had been consumed by fussy, inner confusion and a desire to dominate everything. He despised



himself for appearing pious and upright in Muslims' eyes, when all the while he knew that there was a vacuum in his soul where God should be.

**b)** Though he has confessed that the main reason for his dissatisfaction with Hizb was his friendship with Faye, a Bangladeshi girl who asked him leave this path and pursue his career for a brighter future, Husain finally left Hizb after realizing that Hizb was propelling him toward violence.

**c)** Nevertheless, his de-radicalization also took place slowly. He slowly and gradually realized that all Islamist teachings are, in fact, products of their time and Islamists' claims of intellectual purity are false.

**d)** After leaving Hizb, Husain wondered how to lead a normal life. He had only a vague idea that his motives were not intellectual, political, or even particularly religious. His motives were introspective—for the good of his soul. He finally found solace among Sufi-oriented scholars: a form of Islam that he first learned in his childhood. During his transformation, his family, especially his mother and wife, provided him much needed comfort and support. Their eagerness to share with Husain his latest discoveries and insights helped him completely flush Islamism out of his system.

## **J. CONCLUSION**

Ed Husain's demarche presents a clear account of how the radicalization process occurs at least for some. Notwithstanding the extent to which he has (or has not) narrated the incidents correctly, the book anecdotally describes how young Muslims can be attracted toward extremist thoughts. Can we generalize from the major findings listed above a definite methodology for Islamist recruitment and indoctrination of young Muslims? Is Husain an archetype? Does his joining tell us anything about the extent to which his path can be said to be common across Muslims in the UK?

While Husain speaks with authority and nuance, and offers an insider's view of the context that helps proliferate the Islamists' ideology, his is *not* the

definitive account. In order to validate his experience, we at least have to take into account other studies and literature about Muslim radicalization in Britain.

### III. MODELLING AND CORROBORATING THE RADICALIZATION PATH

#### A. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed *The Islamist* as a case study, highlighting the pathways towards radicalization. The details about the proliferation of radicalization remained limited to what Ed Husain experienced during his journey as an Islamist.

In this chapter, the generalized pathways towards radicalization will be corroborated with the help of other literature available on the subject. Radicalization is a sequential process. Though scholars and researchers have identified different ways in which people become engaged in religious militancy, there are some clear patterns that can help us explain why and how people become attracted to radicalization.

For this chapter, I will adopt Marc Sageman's thesis, which he has elaborated on in his book *Leaderless Jihad*. Sageman writes that there are three ways to study the process of radicalization: focus on the individual and his background; or, search for "root causes" in the social conditions; or, concentrate on how people in groups influence each other to become terrorists.<sup>78</sup> Though Sageman prefers the third approach, saying, "it offers the most fruitful way to understanding the process of radicalization,"<sup>79</sup> I differ from him and take into consideration all three bits to describe the intricate mosaic of radicalization.

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<sup>78</sup> Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 13.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

I do, however, adopt his suggested level of analysis for studying the concept of radicalization: the middle-range level analysis.<sup>80</sup>

This chapter begins by discussing in detail the reasons for seclusion/exclusion of British Muslim communities. It highlights how different incidents adversely affect Muslims' perceptions, reinforcing their belief that they are at war with the UK government, or that the UK government is at war with them. The chapter maps out the radicalization process in four stages. It argues that initial receptivity to religious seeking among UK Muslims is a direct result of an identity crisis. The state triggers a cognitive opening, making individuals vulnerable to outside influences. Cloaked in their new "Islamic identity," Muslims suffer a sense of moral outrage at apparent injustices against all Muslims, both globally and locally. This becomes a central theme, as outside influences resonate with their personal experiences of discrimination. From here begins the process of recruitment through gradual indoctrination, which marks the second stage. Social bonds play a critical role at this stage and sometimes precede ideological commitments. Next, the third stage involves a process of activism, when the fully indoctrinated individual undergoes a replication process by spreading and passing on his convictions to others to whom he has links. Progression along this path carries the individual to fanaticism, the acme of radicalization—the final stage. A graphic representation of this journey is depicted in Figure 1.

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<sup>80</sup> Sageman lists three levels of analysis: the micro-level, which focuses on terrorists; the macro-level, which focuses on the environment; and the middle-range analysis, which bridges the gap between micro and macro approaches and examines how terrorists act on the ground. Sageman, 13-23.

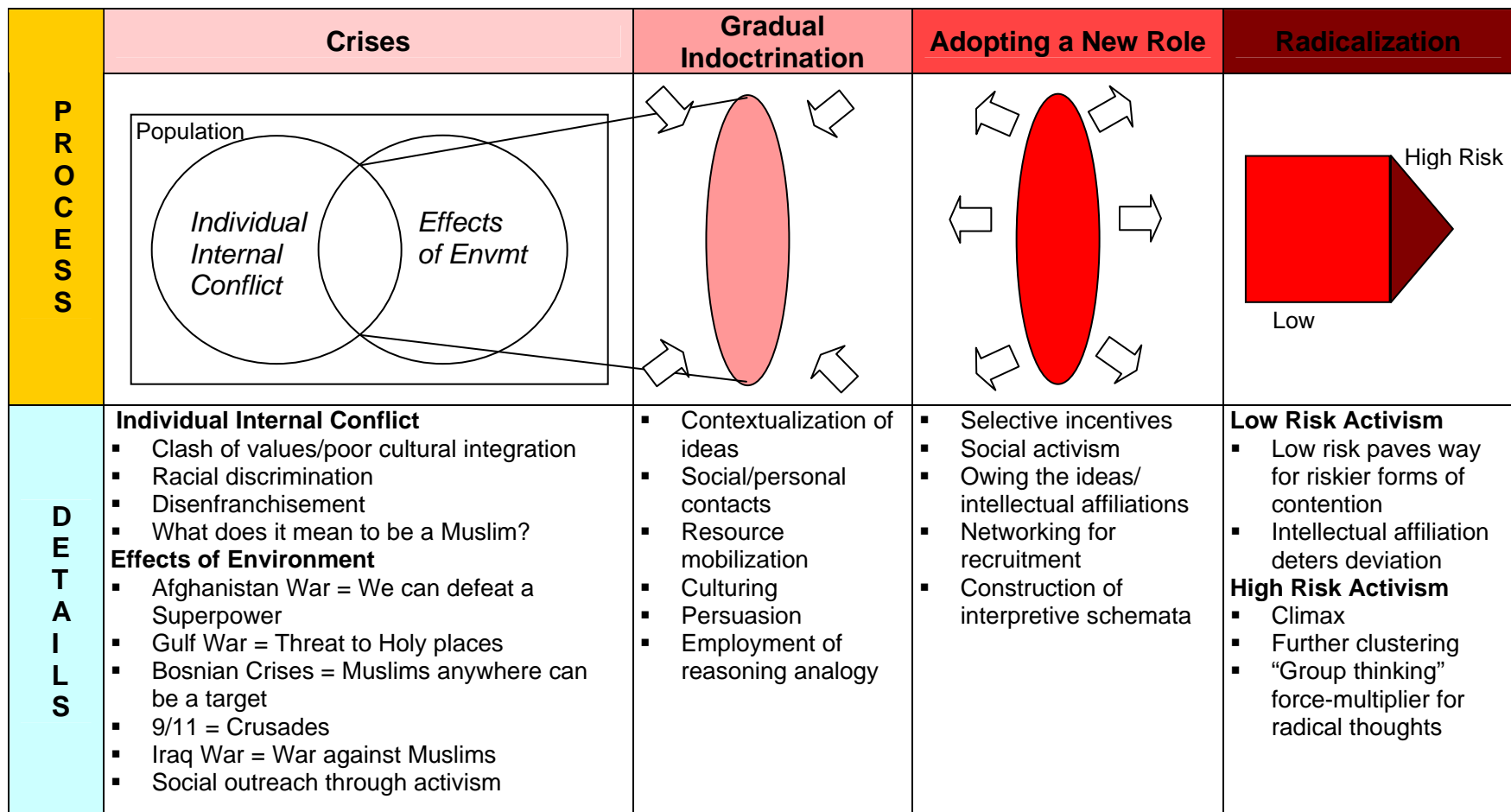


Figure 1. MODELLING THE RADICALIZATION PATH

These four stages of radicalization will be substantiated and studied with the help of the three approaches of *Social Movement Theory* described at the start of Chapter I. *Strain Theory* helps explain how domestic grievances and international predicaments generate a permanent state of crisis. *Resource Mobilization Theory* describes the mechanics involved in the next three stages of radicalization. During this entire process, the interpersonal subjective and communicative processes of framing a situation/issue/problem reveal the utility of the *Framing Theory*.

## **B. STAGE—I: CRISES**

### **1. Predicaments of Muslim Communities in the UK**

#### **a. Muslim Ghettos**

The UK is home to 1.6 million Muslims out of a British population of nearly 60 million, according to the UK's 2001 Census.<sup>81</sup> The majority of Muslims in the UK have their roots in Britain's former colonial territories of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. The UK's labor shortages and immigration policies in the 1950s and 1960s attracted numerous Muslim workers from these countries. Other Muslims in the UK hail from the Middle East and African countries, as well as Turkey. Muslims are the largest religious minority in the UK; 46 percent of all Muslims living in the UK are British-born.<sup>82</sup>

British Muslims have dwelled and established themselves in certain areas over a period of time. For instance, during my interviews in Bradford, I came across a Pakistani who had lived there for the last 35 years; he said, "when I moved in here, there was only one other family of Asians on the street. But now,

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<sup>81</sup> Some experts believe that the UK's Muslim population may be as high as 2 million, if undocumented asylum-seekers or illegal immigrants are added to the government's official figures. Paul Gallis et al, "Muslims in Europe: Integration Politics in Selected Countries," *Congressional Research Service Report*, Order Code RL 33166, November 18, 2005, Committee Print, 10.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

over the course of 35 years, it's mainly Asians. This community is more traditional, like back home, Pakistan.”<sup>83</sup> One hears much the same story in East London, which has a Bangladeshi majority, or in Finsbury, which is predominantly Arab. Elsewhere in the UK, Birmingham and Manchester are well known for their Asian Muslim enclaves.

One can only understand how tightly knit and closed these societies are if one gets a chance to visit them. They have their own food shops, mosques, schools, and recreational spots. Among these, the two social institutions that cast a dominant influence over the community are mosques and schools. Both are interlinked. As an Imam of East London Mosque told me in an interview, “almost 90 percent of the Muslim community that lives in and around East London sends their kids to schools affiliated with East London Mosque.”<sup>84</sup>

Another peculiar feature of the British Muslim community is that one finds people still anchored to their culture and traditions back home. It is a common sight to see people wearing their regional dress, especially in the case of females and older people. Similarly, Muslim families subscribe to those channels on cable/satellite TV that are in their mother tongue, and the main reason they give for this is that “they do not want their kids watching European channels because most of the programs are objectionable.”<sup>85</sup>

Other topics that recurred frequently during my conversations with Muslims in the UK included forced marriages, racism, drugs and criminality, and unemployment.

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with Mr. Umair Qureshi, resident of Bradford, January 4, 2009.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Imam Abdul Qayyum, Imam of East London Mosque, London, January 6, 2009.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Mr. Samad Nevasandu, an Iraqi asylum seeker living in London, January 6, 2009.

**b. Reasons for Seclusion/Exclusion**

(1) Multiculturalism: There are many factors that are responsible for the apparent alienation of young British Muslims from mainstream influences in society, multiculturalism being one of them. The inability of the British Government to impose a single British identity and culture is the single most important reason “for the self imposed segregation of Muslim communities, a proliferation of mosques staffed by radical clerics and the establishment of Muslim faith schools that emphasize Koranic studies and teach South Asian languages.”<sup>86</sup>

Multiculturalism has failed to facilitate cultural integration in the UK because it has focused too much on ethnic diversity as opposed to helping draw out or instill a mainstream kind of Britishness throughout the land. Consequently, after more than sixty years, some ethnic minorities are still ethnic minorities. The fact that many adhere to a different religious faith and attachment to their country of origin, and its culture and traditions, is deemed problematic because such attachments may mean a lesser propensity to identify with Britain and “Britishness.”<sup>87</sup>

(2) Perception of Not Being Accepted: The urgency to enquire into the reasons for exclusion is partially driven by the widespread perception among Muslims that they are not accepted by British society, despite government programs to support multiculturalism. Their convictions regarding their experience with “Islamophobia” belie claims of tolerance.<sup>88</sup> During my visit to the UK, I asked one Pakistani whether he thinks he has been accepted as

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<sup>86</sup> James Wither, “A Work in Progress – The UK’s Campaign against Radicalization,” *Occasional Paper* prepared by George C. Marshall European Centre for Security Studies, Germany, September 2006, 9, <http://www.ProQuest.org/> (accessed December 20, 2008).

<sup>87</sup> M. Y. Alam, *Made in Bradford* (London: Route Publishers, 2006), 16.

<sup>88</sup> “Islamophobia” was first identified in 1997 by Runnymede Trust’s Report. The report noted that hostility and hatred towards British Muslims was becoming more explicit, more extreme and more dangerous. Ziauddin Sardar, *Balti Britain: A Journey through the British Asian Experience*, (London: Granta UK, 2008), 337.



British in the UK. He replied, “well, these *goras* tell us, you can be a British but not an English, who associate themselves with privileges of the House of Lords, foxhunting, and exclusiveness of class.”<sup>89</sup>

According to a survey in 2002, 69 percent of Muslims felt that the broader society did not consider them integral to life in Britain. Since 9/11, the situation has grown worse. In a poll of Asian Muslims shortly after the 9/11 attacks, 57 percent indicated that relations with non-Muslims had deteriorated. More than a year later, 37 percent of non-Muslims were thought be less sympathetic to Muslims since 9/11. This perception is not an artifact of community sensitivity: 84 percent of non-Muslims have indeed become more suspicious of Muslims since the attack.<sup>90</sup>

(3) Clash of Values: British Muslims nowadays are undergoing an experience of inter-generational strain. M. Y. Alam, in his book *Made in Bradford*, attributes this tension to competition between Western secularism and traditional religious beliefs, leaving young Muslims in Britain caught between the beliefs and networks of their parents and the host-society that limits their acceptance on the basis of race, ethnicity, and faith.<sup>91</sup>

The secular laws of the UK often clash with Muslim religious principles when it comes to issues like gambling, alcohol, investment, gender, adultery, homosexuality, and blasphemy. The dominant reaction to this predicament is a non-violent, non-political, neo-fundamentalist reinvigoration of faith and a return to activism that emphasizes personal action and social activism in search of “a new Ummah.”<sup>92</sup> As one reporter puts it, “Reconciling these

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<sup>89</sup> Interview with Mr. Rizwan Ali, a Pakistani British National who is a resident of London, January 5, 2009.

<sup>90</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising – Muslim Extremism in the West* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 89.

<sup>91</sup> Alam, *Made in Bradford*, 1.

<sup>92</sup> Brendan O’ Duffy, “Radical Atmosphere: Explaining Jihadist Radicalization in the UK,” *Political Science & Politics*, 2008, 38, <http://www.ProQuest.org/> (accessed December 20, 2008).

contradictions with compromising their faith and way of life is a central challenge for British Muslims and the society in which they live.”<sup>93</sup>

(4) Disenfranchisement: Today, more than ever, British Muslims are asked to prove themselves as not only loyal and peaceful, but also as integrated citizens.<sup>94</sup> Questions revolving around loyalty and citizenship are regularly asked within a frame that juxtaposes Islam with Europe and, in so doing, frequently reasserts the emergent tensions of having a Muslim presence in the West.<sup>95</sup> Social exclusion, unemployment and the lack of opportunities further strengthen the perception that citizenship is constructed in exclusive terms.<sup>96</sup>

A report published by the Open Society Institute’s EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program found that Muslims in Britain (who represent 3 percent of the population) are the most disadvantaged faith group. They are three times more likely to be unemployed than Christians, have the lowest employment rate of any group (38 percent) and the highest level of economic inactivity (52 percent). They tend to live in the most disadvantaged wards and their employment tends to be in low-paid manual and self-employed sectors. Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims in London have the highest proportion of children in workless households (30–40 percent).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 89.

<sup>94</sup> Alam, *Made in Bradford*, 20.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>96</sup> Sardar, *Balti Britain*, 288.

<sup>97</sup> Duffy, “Radical Atmosphere: Explaining Jihadist Radicalization in the UK,” 40.

(5) Discrimination: The experience of both racial and religious discrimination often prompts some young Muslims to question their identity and how they fit into British society. Many Muslims also believe that the law treats them more harshly because of their religion. The Muslim community, for example, cites the prison sentences given to the predominantly Muslim Asian participants in the Bradford riots (July 2001). The average sentences for 46 rioters were 4.5 years longer than terms handed down to rioters in Belfast.<sup>98</sup>

Although these disparities may not be a direct result of racism, racial discrimination compounds the sense of exclusion and inequity. Forty percent of all Britons believe Britain is a racist society. Sixty percent of blacks and Asians say they have experienced verbal racism, 20 percent complain of physical racial abuse, and 33 percent of Asians feel that racial prejudice is worse now than it was five years ago.<sup>99</sup>

These experiences are exacerbated by the activities of racist, right-wing groups like the British National Party. This group is known for its public anti-Muslim campaigns. After the worldwide row over the Danish cartoons, BNP was accused of deliberately ramping up racial and religious tensions by launching a leafletting campaign with anti-Muslim messages, including controversial cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>100</sup>

(6) What Does it Mean to be a Muslim?: Disenfranchisement and discrimination have led many to wonder: what *does* it mean to be a Muslim in a non-Muslim country? Here, it must be remembered that British Muslims enjoy only limited theological guidance about how to practice Islam in a Western country, dominated as it is by secular social, political, economic, and cultural traditions.

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<sup>98</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 89.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>100</sup> Mathew Taylor, "BNP Accused of Exploiting Cartoons Row with Muslim Leaflet," *The Guardian*, October 5, 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2006/oct/05/uk.advertising> (accessed January 15, 2009).

This question of what it means to be Muslim in a non-Muslim country is complicated by the fact that Muslim minorities in Western countries are heterogeneous: they are frequently divided by ethnicity, language, culture, and religious traditions. As Olivier Roy observes, “While old minorities had time to build their own cultures or to share the dominant culture (Tartars, Indians, China’s Hui), Muslims in recently settled minorities have to reinvent what makes them Muslim, in the sense that the common defining factor of this population as Muslim is the mere reference to Islam, with no common cultural or linguistic heritage.”<sup>101</sup>

**c. Identity Crisis and Cognitive Opening**

Many of the young British Muslims drawn to extremism feel a sense of cultural alienation, disenfranchisement, and discrimination in a society that does not fully accept them. As a result, they appear to turn to Islam as a badge of collective identity to counteract their feeling of exclusion.<sup>102</sup> Exclusion is constructed by outsiders, i.e., other Britons, whose discrimination reinforces individual Muslims’ cognitive boundaries. Consequently, despite being heterogeneous, Muslims recast and rationalize a collective identity expressed through new cultural material—names, narrative, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and so on.

Besides creating a collective identity, such alienation and disenfranchisement also lead to what Quintan Wiktorowicz describes as a cognitive opening in his article, “Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam.” He claims this is a key process that enhances the likelihood that a potential effete will be drawn to a radical Islamist group.<sup>103</sup> In his book *Radical Islam Rising—Muslim Extremism in the West*, Wiktorowicz further argues that

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<sup>101</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 89.

<sup>102</sup> Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 18.

<sup>103</sup> Wiktorowicz, “Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam,” 1.

individuals are initially inspired by a cognitive opening that shakes certitude in previously accepted beliefs. Once individuals are willing to expose themselves to new ways of thinking and worldviews, the cognitive opening helps facilitate possible receptivity to joining a movement and engaging in activism.<sup>104</sup>

In many cases, individuals can address and resolve a crisis or psychological distress through their current belief system. But, where this seems inadequate, individuals may be open to other views. The specific crisis that prompts a cognitive opening varies across individuals. Any number of things can prompt a cognitive opening (e.g., experiences with discrimination, a socio-economic crisis, political repression, etc.), which means that there is no single catalyst for triggering initial interest. In addition, movements can foster a cognitive opening through activism and outreach by raising consciousness, challenging and debating the status quo with/via alternative ideas, and persuading audiences that old ways of thinking are inadequate for addressing pressing economic, political, and social concerns.<sup>105</sup> Worth noting is that when an individual's identity is tied to religion or derives its meaning from religion, a cognitive opening may lead to "religious seeking"—a process by which an individual searches for some satisfactory system of religious meaning through which to interpret and resolve his discontent.<sup>106</sup>

## **2. Effects of Environment**

### **a. 1980s Afghan Jihad**

Any commentary about Muslim radicalization in the UK should begin with the Afghan Jihad (1980–87).<sup>107</sup> Muslims all over the world were

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<sup>104</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 5.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> John Lofland & Rodney Stark, "Becoming a World Server: A Theory of Conversion to Deviant Perspective," *American Sociological Review*, December 1965, 868.

<sup>107</sup> The Iranian Revolution happened before the Afghan Jihad, but it is not considered a significant influence. Most of the UK Muslims are Sunnis who tend to see the Afghan Jihad as the first major event affecting them.

encouraged to be *mujahids*. Although there is no data available in the public domain that could substantiate how many British Muslims joined the jihad, it would be fair to say that there was a sizable involvement. Hassan Butt, a former jihadi, said in an interview with Bob Simon on CBS News that, “There was an unspoken deal between *mujahideen* and the UK government that as long as do not you do anything inside the UK it is OK with them.”<sup>108</sup>

All-out support by family members and praise from the international community motivated the young Muslims to fight in the name of religion. This period in Britain also saw branches of *jihadi* organizations like Hizb ut-Tahrir open for recruitment for the Afghanistan Jihad in the late 1980s. In 1989, once the war ended and most *jihadis* returned home, their homecoming slowly laid the groundwork for major change in the thinking of British Muslims in the UK. For most who returned, the struggle represented an unending agenda. Afghan veterans became local heroes. They did not merge with society, but remained committed to propagating their “religious idealism”—a subterranean phenomenon that the British government ignored until the storm was already underway.

#### **b. Salman Rushdie**

The publication of Salman Rushdie’s book *The Satanic Verses* in 1988 was the defining watershed for British Muslim identity and activism. Previously, Muslims were only seen as part of the general “Asian” community (despite the fact that UK Muslims are racially diverse) and their activism was limited to “race” issues.<sup>109</sup> *The Satanic Verses* changed the matrix.

The Muslim community called for the book’s proscription and “lobbied the Government by urging the PM to prosecute the author and publications under the Race Relations and Public Order Acts, but to their dismay,

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<sup>108</sup> Hassan Butt Interview with Bob Simon on “60 Minutes,” a CBS News broadcast in March 2007.

<sup>109</sup> Anthony McRoy, *From Rushdie to 7/7: The Radicalization of Islam in Britain* (London: Social Affair Unit, 2006), 10.

nothing happened.”<sup>110</sup> The failure of traditional leaders to make any real impact opened the way for Islamists to seize the moment. On 14 January 1989, the Bradford Council of Mosques, with 1,000 persons present, publicly burnt the book, one aim being to assuage feelings of frustration in the Muslim community.<sup>111</sup> This issue divided Muslims from Westerners along the fault line of culture, pitting the core Western value of freedom of expression—that no one should be killed, or face a serious threat of being killed, for what they say or write—against the core belief of many Muslims—that no one should be free to insult and malign Muslims by disparaging the honor of the Prophet Muhammad.

Here, it is important to consider how an average Muslim regarded the entire episode. The greatest fear of many British Muslims was that their children would be contaminated by “infidel” ideas, resulting in the younger generation becoming morally loose, even practically apostate. Rushdie was seen as a paragon of this.<sup>112</sup> As Ziauddin Sardar puts it, “Rushdie is an instantly recognizable historical type, the ‘brown sahib’ who is at once an insider and a total alien, outsider. The brown sahib has an acute inferiority complex about his original identity: he hates his Indian/Muslim self. Yet, on the other hand, he knows he can never be accepted as a *pukkah* sahib.”<sup>113</sup>

### **c. Kuwait (Gulf War I)**

British Muslims scarcely had time to catch their breath before another crisis erupted. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait captured the imagination of Muslims across the globe as an anti-imperialist action, reversing the artificial colonial borders imposed after the First World War by Britain and France.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> McRoy, 11.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>113</sup> Ziauddin Sardar, “The Rushdie Malaise: A Critique of Some Writings on the Rushdie Affair,” in Anthony McRoy, *From Rushdie to 7/7*, 14.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 15.

Saddam Hussein was praised for waging war because he dared to challenge the West directly. In contrast, the Saudis who scrambled to stop the war were looked at as people who had 'betrayed' the honor of Islam, first by their soft approach in the Rushdie affair and now by allowing non-Muslims to defile the Islamic Holy Land and attack and 'massacre' fellow Muslims. As with the Rushdie affair, during the Gulf crisis the general response among Britons was negative. British Muslims were denounced, insulted, threatened and physically attacked.<sup>115</sup>

#### **d. *Bosnia***

Soon after Gulf War I, the Bosnian crisis shocked the UK Muslim community, in part because Bosnian Muslims held the very identity that the British government was understood to be suggesting for British Muslims, yet this did not prevent Bosnians from being slaughtered.<sup>116</sup> Given Bosnia's proximity to Britain, British Muslims expressed concern that they could be the next victims of Western Islamophobia.<sup>117</sup>

The relationship of the Bosnian tragedy to the condition of British Muslims is crucial to understanding developments in the UK Muslim community.<sup>118</sup> During the Rushdie affair, Muslims were accused of possessing values hostile to the cultural norms of modern Britain. During the Gulf Crisis, they were accused of disloyalty to the British in a wartime situation. The insinuation was that Muslims were not really 'British' and therefore not part of Western or European civilization. The implication of these sentiments, added to the abuse and occasional violence that British Muslims experienced in the streets during

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<sup>115</sup> Sardar, 18.

<sup>116</sup> As a consequence of the law and order situation during the Rushdie Affair and Gulf War I, the British government told Muslims, "they could only function, or even reside, in Britain if they become 'integrated' – passive about their religious identity." Ibid., 21.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 23.



these crises, was that Muslims were unwelcome in Britain because of their religion or, more specifically, because of their assertiveness about it.<sup>119</sup>

**e. 9/11 and U.S. Invasion of Afghanistan**

Some experts, including moderate Muslims leaders in the UK, also believe that the recent war in Afghanistan has helped radicalize still more British Muslims, and has strengthened terrorist recruitment efforts. The fact that it was the U.S. that trained these *Mujahideen* and used them for its own ends became the hot topic for discussion in the UK. For a layman, the intricacies of international politics were beyond understanding; here was a clear case of double standards.

The British government's support for the U.S. invasion was protested, and members of Islamist organizations like al-Muhajiroun and Hizb ut-Tahrir openly said that they would fight and kill British troops fighting in Afghanistan.<sup>120</sup> The negative effects of the Afghanistan war on the British Muslim community have been highlighted in various forums. British Brigadier Ed Butler's comments, published in an article in *The Telegraph*, are particularly noteworthy. According to Butler, "there is a link between Kandahar and urban conurbations in the UK," and "the traffic between the British and Afghanistan flow in both directions, with some British Muslims returning from the region and posing a domestic security threat."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Sardar, 21.

<sup>120</sup> The statement was made by Mr. Naveed Butt, a Hizb-ut-Tahrir leader in Pakistan. It was posted on the Hizb website: *Hizb-ut-Tahrir – Wilayah Pakistan Q&A*, <http://www.khilafat.pk/home/Q&A.html> (accessed February 15, 2009).

<sup>121</sup> Con Coughlin et al, "British Muslims 'fighting with Taliban in Afghanistan'," *The Telegraph*, August 02, 2008. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/2485750/British-Muslims-fighting-with-Taliban-in-Afghanistan.html> (accessed February 15, 2009).

**f. U.S. Invasion of Iraq**

Perhaps the gravest damage to relationships in Britain has been done by the U.S. invasion of Iraq. "The Iraq invasion lacked the approval of either the Security Council or major multilateral alliances like NATO."<sup>122</sup> The U.S. policy of going to war in Iraq stemmed from dangers posed by the potential use of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) by Saddam or their transfer to terrorists. "After the U.S. backed coalition invaded Iraq and found no cache of WMD, the international community attacked the legitimacy of the war."<sup>123</sup> The British government, which provided corroborating intelligence on Iraqi WMD, also came under direct pressure. Britain's status as a moral leader was damaged by the war in Iraq.

The Islamists made this issue a major rallying point, and agitated Muslims to take to the streets in protest against the government that had Muslim blood on its hands. Related issues involving the treatment of detainees in Abu Ghraib prison and at Guantanamo Bay prison also generated a Muslim backlash in Britain.

**g. Social Outreach Activism**

These international events provided the radical Islamic movements like Hizb ut-Tahrir, Supporter of the Shariah, and al-Muhajiroun, which had bases or branches in the UK, with a pretext to rally Muslims to their cause. The above-listed exogenous influences created an excellent opportunity for the Islamists to launch their social outreach activism. This activism affected the Muslim community in different ways. Many merely listened to talks and attended events sponsored by the various groups. Others became committed activists, willing to

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<sup>122</sup> Kimberly Marten, "Is Stability the Answer?," in *Leashing the Dogs of War*, ed. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson & Pamela Aall (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press), 633.

<sup>123</sup> Lieutenant Colonel John J. Hickey Jr., "In the Aftermath of Operation Iraqi Freedom: European Support for GWOT," in *Strategic Challenges for Counterinsurgency and GWOT*, ed. William Murray (U.S. Army War College: Pennsylvania, September, 2006): 198, <http://www.Jstore.org/> (accessed February 15, 2009).

sacrifice themselves for the cause. Such groups drew in only a small minority of the Muslim population in the UK as members, but an increasing number of Muslims seemed attracted to their message, particularly in the Midlands around London.<sup>124</sup>

Why did social outreach activism by the radical groups attract so many Muslims from the general Muslim community in the UK? Most studies of the causes of Islamism offer a grievance-based explanation that blames/credits individual frustration and motivation for “deviant” social behavior.<sup>125</sup> But this ignores the idea that Islamists perhaps fostered a cognitive opening through their social outreach.

Activists made optimal use of the environment and took advantage of their social networks and made new acquaintances. They then germinated a sense of crisis among their contacts in discussions and subtle interactions. Islamic activists, for example, would frequently initiate innocuous discussions about Islam with congregants at the mosque in an effort to develop new relationships and instill a sense of urgency about the need to address pressing concerns. This includes appeals to Muslim solidarity by “educating” Muslims about crises in places like the Palestinian territories, Kashmir, and Bosnia.<sup>126</sup>

Islamism offers pride in a common religious identity to relieve the feelings of anger, frustration, and humiliation felt by many in the Muslim world. These emotions are aroused by many different factors, including perceptions about the economic and political backwardness of much of the Middle East. The perception that the Western powers are the source of these Muslim ills reinforces a sense of grievance. Osama bin Laden, as leader of al-Qaeda, has effectively played on Muslim anger to gain support for his radical agenda. In a message after the 9/11 attacks, he claimed, “Our nation has tasted this humiliation and

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<sup>124</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 3.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 20.

contempt for more than eighty years. Its sons are being killed. Its blood is being shed, its holy places attacked and it is not being ruled according to what God has decreed.”<sup>127</sup>

Another common Islamist tactic for fostering a cognitive opening has been the use of “moral shock.” Its main purpose is to make people receptive to accepting views that they otherwise would consider too radical. Moral shock is used to spark interest, prompt further questions, and initiate contact with potential joiners.<sup>128</sup>

## **C. STAGE—II: GRADUAL INDOCTRINATION**

### **1. Establishing a Relationship**

Activists’ first endeavor is to develop new personal ties and relationships. Surprisingly, their tactics are similar to those of most known religious activists. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) recruits, for example, primarily through outreach efforts and the formation of new personal relationships.<sup>129</sup> A similar pattern has been described for the Unification Church (Moonies). Members “pick up” people in public places and invite them to dinners and events while minimizing overt religious content. These dinners and events are then used to develop effective bonds to pull individuals into the network, where they can be encapsulated and converted into committed activists.<sup>130</sup>

In a similar fashion, some Islamic activists, particularly jihadis, hide their movement identity until after a personal relationship is developed.<sup>131</sup> Islamist activists identify the mosque as the typical starting point for creating new social ties; the relationship in the mosque is the best type of relationship because

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<sup>127</sup> James Wither, “A Work in Progress,” 6.

<sup>128</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 21.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>130</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

people are sitting in the house of Allah, a natural religious setting where individuals are already predisposed to discuss issues related to religion. However, Islamists do not start discussing the need for jihad and radical transformation right away; such rash behavior will likely estrange the average Muslim, so activists limit their ideological discussion and hide their organizational affiliation.

Although established relationships are commonly used to facilitate cognitive openings, activists also approach strangers and acquaintances. In these cases, trust has yet to be established. As a result, activists do not immediately leap to challenge their new friends' beliefs. They instead begin slowly through casual conversation. The objective is to learn about the particular concerns of targeted individuals so that conversations can be shaped to address issues of common interest.<sup>132</sup> In such cases, perceptions about credibility are essential for recruitment.<sup>133</sup> Once seekers accept credibility and the activists' right to sacred authority, the way to socialization and culturing is opened.<sup>134</sup>

## **2. Contextualizing Ideas**

Only once individuals are exposed to the movement and express initial interest are they persuaded and slowly indoctrinated. At this early stage, Islamist activists try to establish and strengthen a bond of shared values. For that, they employ an "educational social network as radical and moderate fundamentalists alike devote the bulk of their time and energies to religious learning."<sup>135</sup> They spend a great deal of time and energy discussing who they are, what they should become, and which people have the right to decide that.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 96.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 17.

<sup>136</sup> Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individuals' Needs in Contemporary Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 128.

Like other “new social movements,” radical Islamic activists promote a set of values and identities that challenge dominant cultural codes. By doing so, they seek to create a common community of “true believers” tied together through a shared interpretation of Islam, typically characterized by high levels of tension with common religious understandings.<sup>137</sup> Activists focus on teaching Muslims about deviance from mainstream interpretations while offering the movement’s own understanding as definitive.<sup>138</sup> The resulting “network of shared meaning” is the basis of a common identity that frequently involves commands to risky activism in the name of God.<sup>139</sup>

Activists generally tap into already formed beliefs and values to ensure acceptance. Most organizations like Jamat-e-Islami, al-Muhajiroun, and Hizb ut-Tahrir conceptualize Islam as *din*, an ideology or a way of life, rather than as just a religion because “religion” usually refers to a set of rituals or an aspect of man’s relationship with his Creator. *Din*, on the other hand, serves as a creed, upon which all aspects of life are built.<sup>140</sup> By presenting Islam as a comprehensive system of living, activists directly challenge other dominant ideologies in a cosmic struggle for the soul of humanity.<sup>141</sup> “Students are taught that following any kind of human-made law is apostasy because it rejects the idea of sovereignty for God alone.”<sup>142</sup> This affects a wide variety of behaviors. However, this fact is never brought to the forefront right at the outset of indoctrination; it comes into play only towards the end of this stage.

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<sup>137</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 17.

<sup>138</sup> Juergensmeyer theorizes such tendencies as “fundamentalism.” Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 158.

<sup>139</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 17.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>141</sup> Here we find “The Cosmic War Theory” in play. Religion defines for its devotees what is an “ultimate order” and, while doing so, also envisions “disorder.” To achieve primacy of order, the paradox locks together the religious harmony and violent disruption in a cosmic struggle. Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?*, 158.

<sup>142</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 172.

### 3. Persuasion Techniques

Mostly, the Islamist movements are voluntary in nature and do not rely on direct coercion to indoctrinate potential participants. People become converts gradually, even inadvertently, through the influence of social relationship, especially during times of social strain.<sup>143</sup>

Wiktorowicz argues that conversion to Islamist includes introspection as well as interaction. People question, weigh, and evaluate their situation and options.<sup>144</sup> The style of interaction is to take each individual on a case-by-case basis and identify his most relevant concerns and issues. The activists, in essence, try to find an issue for which Islam can be offered as a solution. Muhammad Omar Bakri, an Islamist militant leader who remained instrumental in developing Hizb ut-Tahrir and later al-Muhajiroun, provides an example that is worth quoting at length:<sup>145</sup>

So what is the problem today? The way you open it is you need to address the person. Where do you come from? "Bangladesh." Oh, Bangladesh. How is the situation there in Bangladesh? What do you yourself think is the problem? Why all these bombs are here and there? He will say, "Oh, the problem is the increasing of the price on rice, the rice and sugar [prices] increased." See he makes his own analysis. Oh, but do you think the problem is a shortage of food? "I do not believe so." What about courts? "There are cases that take years." So there is a problem of management as a whole. So you can link it to Islam.

All meetings, when you meet a Muslim or non-Muslim, in your mind are three questions: problem, solutions, action. Now you want to let people know the problem. They look to the symptoms. Look at the cause! Make him think about the cause, not the symptoms. Not the effect, the cause – the main problem. After that you start to inspire. "What should we do about that.?" Inspire him to think and give him some light. Interact with him, let him see. That is a solution.

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<sup>143</sup> James T. Richardson, "The Active vs. Passive Convert: Paradigm Conflict in Conversion/Recruitment Research," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 24 (1985), 173.

<sup>144</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 24.

<sup>145</sup> Muhammad Omar Bakri's interview by Wiktorowicz (June 2002), 97.

An important thing to note here is that the activists are careful to let the individual come to his/her own conclusion about the issue through conversation and dialogue. The motive remains here to give the individual ownership over his or her decision to look deeper into the problem. Similarly, activists do not immediately jump into a discussion about enforcing *Shariah* or re-establishing the caliphate. Such a direct approach will likely turn away new contacts. Instead, the technique is to find issues that lead to a discussion about Islam and hopefully foster a cognitive opening. The movement specifically trains its activists in these techniques.<sup>146</sup>

This approach is not unique to the UK. In Egypt, for example, Islamist pamphlets advise propagators: “Before broaching the sensitive issue at hand, the *da’i* [propagator] must cultivate a relationship with the individual in question or ‘addressee.’ The *da’i* should demonstrate his empathy and concern for the addressee’s problem and, when possible, help resolve them. The objective is to first “‘awaken his dormant faith’ so that ‘the addressee’s heart will become open to knowledge of the Day of Judgment.’ Then teach him or her about obligations to God.”<sup>147</sup> Most of the Islamist groups use this approach to facilitate cognitive openings.

#### 4. “Culturing”

To understand why some individuals eventually commit themselves to Islamist activism, it is important to understand “culturing,” or what activists term *tarbiya*. Islamists try to draw seekers into religious lessons, where they can be cultured in the movement’s ideology. The ideology emphasizes that the only way to achieve salvation and enter paradise on Judgment Day is to follow the movement’s prescribed strategy.<sup>148</sup> Religious lessons serve as a low-risk forum where, over time, eventual activists are socialized into the ideological template of

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<sup>146</sup> Muhammad Omar Bakri’s interview by Wiktorowicz (June 2002), 97.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.



the movement. Clearly, not every individual who is exposed to these lessons accepts the movement ideology as “true” Islam. But for those who become “intellectually affiliated” and adopt movement precepts, the Islamists offer a rational strategy for advancing spiritual self-interest.<sup>149</sup>

The ideological template provided to activists during this “culturing” process calls for three divine duties, and the students are taught that an individual must fulfill all three or risk damnation. First, like the Prophet, Muslims must engage in *tarbiya* and *dawa*. This involves lessons and activities that teach people divine duties and responsibilities. The second divine duty is to promote virtue and prevent vice. And the third duty is the establishment of the Caliphate.<sup>150</sup> The important aspect of this template is that it is believed by all activists to already have proved to be successful; the Prophet employed this method to spread Islam and for any Muslim to find fault with the system is very difficult.

The cornerstone of the culturing process is the initial premise that one must fulfill God’s command and follow *tawhid* or risk individual salvation. Socialized to believe deeply in this premise, individuals who internalize the norms are likely to accept high-risk activism. Serving God is the only way to this salvation, and the ideology maps out how this service should be done to ensure paradise. Participation in the movement remains rooted in the self-interest of the activist who participates to protect his or her spiritual destiny.<sup>151</sup>

#### **D. STAGE—III: ADOPTING A NEW ROLE**

##### **1. Selective Incentives**

Why do individuals join a movement when they can simply “free-ride” off the efforts of other? This is particularly pertinent for radical Islamic groups, which

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<sup>149</sup> Muhammad Omar Bakri’s interview by Wiktorowicz (June 2002), 167.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

provide collective goods that will benefit all Muslims, such as the establishment of an Islamic state, the expulsion of the U.S. from Muslim lands, and divine justice. Given the high costs and risks associated with joining a radical organization, joining itself seems to defy the logic of collective action. Mancur Olsen and others point to the use of selective incentives that allow the group leaders to insure cooperation in the provision of the collective good by allowing access to valued group benefits that only cooperators can enjoy.<sup>152</sup> Although early scholarship emphasized material incentives, later scholars have highlighted a number of non-material incentives that also motivate participants, including a sense of belonging (solidarity incentives) and purpose (purposive incentives).<sup>153</sup>

At this stage on the path toward radicalization, individuals have been gradually indoctrinated and are becoming committed activists. These individuals, whom Wiktorowicz calls “intellectual affiliates,” exhibit a strong sense of belonging and find purpose in movement ideology. Religious training lies at the core of such activism. To ensure that they are intellectually equipped with the proper religious beliefs, formal members of most Islamist organizations are required to attend a two-hour study session held by the local *halaqah* every week; attendance is mandatory.<sup>154</sup> The *halaqah* (different organizations use different names, e.g., *Taleemi Jalsa*, *Majlis*, *Usrah*, etc.) is an intensive, “members-only” religious lesson that revolves around the movement’s ideology, and students must spend time preparing for it. Given the intensity of the session, a lack of preparation incurs the ire of movement teachers and social pressure from other participants, thereby discouraging chronic indolence.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Jac C. Heckelman & Dennis Coates, *Collective Choice: Essays in Honor by Mancur Olsen* (New York: Springer, 2003), 222.

<sup>153</sup> William Riker & Peter Ordeshook, “A Theory of Calculus of Voting,” *American Political Science Review* 62 (1968): 25-42; David Sikkink & Rory McVeigh, “Who wants to Protest?” Working Paper & Technical Report no 2001-10 (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre University, Department of Sociology, 2001).

<sup>154</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 47.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

Besides religious indoctrination, Islamists participate in a variety of public outreach events. Their participation gives them the purposive incentive that, unlike other Muslims, they are physically contributing to the cause. Every week, members host at least one public study circle, which is advertised at the local mosque and in the movement newsletter. The public circles are intended to disseminate movement ideology and draw in new recruits. Other public outreach programs include movement-sponsored public talks, *tafsirs*, and community events. For example, every Friday and Saturday afternoon, al-Muhajiroun members are required to set up a *da'wa* stall in their local community. Activists put up posters, chant slogans, shout through loudspeakers, and interact with observers and passing pedestrians. In effect, these are small protest rallies, usually attended by as many as twenty local activists.<sup>156</sup>

## **2. Criticality of Social Networks for Recruitment**

Several recent studies on the spread of the religious movements have found that interpersonal bonds played a significant role. For instance, Heirich carefully assessed the relative significance of deprivation, prior socialization, and social influence in determining religious recruitment. While he feels that other factors not identified by any of these approaches may also be important, his detailed analysis shows that social ties had a powerful effect.<sup>157</sup> Attitudinal affinity may predispose an individual to join a movement, but social ties are critical for transforming interest and availability into activism itself.<sup>158</sup> For Islamic groups, socialization is thus critical to mobilizing support and activism in the face of extensive costs and risks.

Carrie Wickham's study of the Islamic movement in Egypt, for example, reveals how Islamists promoted a new ethic of civic obligation to encourage

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<sup>156</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 49.

<sup>157</sup> Rodney Stark & William Sins Bainbridge, "Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Cults and Sects," *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 6 (1980): 1390.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

participation in the public sphere, regardless of benefits and costs.<sup>159</sup> Islamists propagated the new ethic of civic obligation through outreach efforts, study circles, religious lessons, *tafsirs*, person-to-person conversation, and discussions. Likewise, in a study of pacifist movements, James Downton and Paul Wehr also cite socialization as one of the most critical variables for ensuring continued commitment. Both are of the opinion that, during recruitment for collective action, various socialization influences effect the formation of beliefs, which make people more attitudinally available for activism.<sup>160</sup>

The typical pattern, then, is not one of an isolated individual independently searching for religious answers. Heirich believes that impact of social networks is striking indeed—for those already oriented towards religious quest.<sup>161</sup> Whether prompted by an independent cognitive opening or attracted through movement outreach, seekers do not typically seek religious meaning in a vacuum. They turn to friends and family for direction and as possible sources of religious learning. When their social contacts bring them into contact with a movement, seekers are likely to be drawn to the movement's activities since social ties are trusted pathways of information.<sup>162</sup>

In the case of Islamic movements, seekers frequently “seek” with friends who are also interested in religious learning. This increases the social dimensions of the activism and the prospects for solidarity.<sup>163</sup> Activists themselves usually begin by targeting people they know, thus increasing the importance of social pathways in both directions: seekers reach out to activists’

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<sup>159</sup> Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 120.

<sup>160</sup> James Downton Jr. & Paul Wehr, “Persistent Pacifism: How Activist Commitment is Developed and Sustained,” *Journal of Peace Research* 35, no. 5 (1998), 546.

<sup>161</sup> Max Heirich, “Change of Heart: A Test of Some Widely Held Theories about Religious Conversion,” *American Journal of Sociology*, November 1977, 674.

<sup>162</sup> David Knoke, “Network of Political Action: Towards Theory Construction,” *Social Force*, June 1990, 1041-63.

<sup>163</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 22.

friends, and activists' friends reach out to seekers.<sup>164</sup> Activists can use these relationships to foster "guided religious seeking" and lead seekers to movement events, especially when the cognitive opening is prompted by movement outreach.

### **3. Constructing Interpretive Schemata**

The last of the three factors that facilitate participation relates to "framing," a domain where the role of ideas, culture, and cognition come into play. Frames represent "schemata of interpretation" that enable individuals "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" occurrences within activists' life space and the world around. Besides that, such frames are not limited to guiding individual actions but are also highly effective for collective actions.<sup>165</sup> They offer a language and cognitive tools for making sense of events and experiences by interpreting causation, evaluating situations, and offering proscriptive remedies.

David Snow and Robert Benford argue that "by rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action, whether by individuals or the collective."<sup>166</sup> However, only when there is "frame alignment" between an individual and a movement are recruitment and mobilization possible. The movement's schemata must resonate with an individual's own interpretive framework to facilitate participation. This alignment is contingent on fidelity with familiar cultural narratives, symbols, and identities. Hence, to achieve optimum "frame alignment," Islamist activists are expected to learn about the social, cultural, and political environment in which they

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<sup>164</sup> Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terrorist Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 108-113.

<sup>165</sup> Robert D. Benford & David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movement: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 614.

<sup>166</sup> Benford & Snow.

operate.<sup>167</sup> This is considered necessary to facilitate public outreach, communication, and recruitment. For instance, the requirements for every member of al-Muhajiroun are:

1. To take care of the affairs of the people in society.
2. To have a deep understanding of the society: patterns of thought, concepts, emotions, culture, customs and public opinions.
3. To be well equipped with al-Muhajiroun's objectives, methods, concepts, thoughts, culture, work and administration.
4. To have a deep understanding of the groups and the parties in the society, and the different types of thought and disagreements among the members of a group and among groups.<sup>168</sup>

Thus, there is a requirement for all activists to intensively study and master not only the movement's ideology, but also social and political issues. Consequently, members demonstrate a voracious appetite for current events, particularly concerning Muslims, such as the war on terrorism, the situation in Iraq, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. An urge to stay up-to-date on contemporary news, however, does not necessarily translate into an accurate understanding of global issues.<sup>169</sup>

Another factor critical to "frame alignment" is the reputation of the frame articulator. The reputation of the frame articulator affects the credibility and the salience with which the frame is viewed.<sup>170</sup> To persuade Muslims to accept a radical religious interpretation and thus spread radical networks of shared meaning, groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir and al-Muhajiroun try to convince audiences that they have the authority to issue and promote interpretations in the first place.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Benford & Snow, 619–22.

<sup>168</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 48.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 15–16.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 26.

Once an individual is accepted as a formal member of the movement, the culturing process becomes deeper and more complex. As already described for al-Muhajiroun, members participate in “members-only” lessons that deal with more specific technical elements of the ideology. These lessons are run by local branch leaders, who are responsible for leading and managing the lessons.<sup>172</sup>

## **E. STAGE—IV: RADICALIZATION**

### **1. Low Risk Activism**

Radicalization represents the end-state of an Islamist’s activism in most cases. Here, I will explain how individuals are convinced to engage in high-risk, high-cost activism through the process of radicalization. I have already covered how religious education exposes individuals to deliberate “culturing” with the intent of inculcating the movement’s ideology. “Through lessons and other activities, the movement tries to shift individual understandings of self interest in a manner that facilitates progression to risky activism.”<sup>173</sup>

McAdam, for example, argues that socialization through low-risk activism can help “pave the way” for riskier forms of contention: “These ‘safe’ forays into activism may have longer-range consequences...for they place the new recruit ‘at risk’ of being drawn into more costly forms of participation with the cyclical process of integration and resocialization.”<sup>174</sup>

Those who join because they are religious seekers do so, in part, because they find mainstream religious institutions and figures wanting. For these individuals, local imams and mosques have failed to provide guidance for the specific concerns of British Muslims. As a result, such individuals are more amenable to experimentation outside the mainstream. However, not everyone

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<sup>172</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 194.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>174</sup> Doug McAdam, “Recruitment at High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer,” *American Journal of Sociology*, July 1986, 69.

who experiences a cognitive opening is drawn to a radical organization; in fact, most never experiment with radical Islam.

What is so notable about most activists who engage in low risk activism is that they are young. Being idealistic, every generation of youth believes it has the power to change the world. It is this normal stage in young men's intellectual and psychological development that radicals seize and manipulate so effectively.<sup>175</sup>

Earlier in this chapter, I described how the culturing process reframes the initial premise that one must fulfill God's command and follow *tawhid*, and emphasizes instead that failure to do so will risk individual salvation. Frame articulators gradually disclose that God's commands include risky activism. Participation in the movement gets narrowed down to the self-interest of the activist who participates to protect his or her spiritual destiny. In fact, for individuals who become "intellectually affiliated," deviation from the ideological template will jeopardize prospects of individual, never mind collective, salvation.<sup>176</sup>

## **2. High Risk Activism**

Some scholars now argue that even suicide bombings, once seen as the ultimate acts of irrationality, are part of a rational tactic capable of prompting concessions in asymmetrical warfare.<sup>177</sup> Tactics and activism are usually viewed as rational in the sense that they are means designed to achieve a group's goals. A small handful of studies argue that individual suicide bombers can be understood as acting rationally if one emphasizes such things as the importance

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<sup>175</sup> "Militant Jihadism: Radicalization, Conversion, Recruitment," Paper written by *Canadian Centre for Intelligence and Security Studies*, 2006, 9, [http://www.carleton.ca/cciss/res\\_docs/itac/gendron\\_e.pdf](http://www.carleton.ca/cciss/res_docs/itac/gendron_e.pdf) (accessed January 12, 2009).

<sup>176</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 206.

<sup>177</sup> Ehud Sprinzak, "Rational Fanatics," *Foreign Policy*, September-October 2000, 66–73; Robert Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *American Political Social Review* 97, no. 3 (August 2003): 1–19.



of solidarity and contract enforcement between the organization and individual bombers called “art of martyrdom,” which makes it difficult to detect.<sup>178</sup>

High risk activism is similar to what the NYPD in its report, “Radicalization in the West: The Home-grown Threat,” calls *Jihadization*—the phase in which members of a cluster accept their individual duty to participate in jihad and self-designate as *mujhadeen*.<sup>179</sup> The report suggests that activities during this stage are in fact “acts in furtherance,” involving planning, preparation, and execution. It correctly points out that unlike other phases in the radicalization process, which may take place gradually, the shift towards high risk activism can be a rapid process. Elaborating on this transition from low risk activism to high risk activism, the Report notes that individuals generally appear to begin the radicalization process on their own. Invariably, as they progress through the stages of radicalization, they seek like-minded individuals. This leads to the creation of groups or clusters. These clusters appear crucial to progressing to high risk activism—the critical stage that ends up with some engagement in terrorist activity.<sup>180</sup> Terrorism is the extreme consequence of radicalization, the early signs of which are likely to be involvement in a variety of support activities, including criminality.<sup>181</sup>

Once an individual joins a cluster he moves into a totally different sphere. His entire life then revolves around that small network. “Group think” is one of the most powerful catalysts for leading a group to actually commit a terrorist act.

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<sup>178</sup> Mark Harrison, “The Logic of Suicide Terrorism.” *Royal United Services Institute Security Monitor*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2003), 11–13. This paper was presented to the Conference on “Weapons of Catastrophic Effect: Confronting the Threat” sponsored by the *Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies*, London, February 12–14, 2003.

<sup>179</sup> Mitchell D. Silber & Arvin Bhatt, “Radicalization in the West: The Home-grown Threat,” Paper prepared for Police Department The City of New York, 7, [http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/downloads/pdf/public\\_information/NYPD\\_Report-Radicalization\\_in\\_the\\_West.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/downloads/pdf/public_information/NYPD_Report-Radicalization_in_the_West.pdf) (accessed February 24, 2009).

<sup>180</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 9.

<sup>181</sup> “Militant Jihadism,” *Canadian Centre for Intelligence and Security Studies*, 7.

Group think acts as a force-multiplier for radical thought, while creating a competitive environment among the group members for who is the most radical.<sup>182</sup>

Once action becomes a group objective, each member of the cluster is challenged to accept *jihad* as an individual obligation—and they anoint themselves as holy warriors. This act of accepting a personal duty to participate in *jihad* is, by its very nature, an internal decision and one with very a subtle, if not visible, signature. In fact, the only way to know if someone has passed this marker is by observing his subsequent actions or by gaining a window into his personal feelings.<sup>183</sup>

## **F. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the generalized pathways to radicalization have been validated with the help of available information on the subject. I have modeled the path that Muslims take towards radicalization in four distinct stages: crisis, indoctrination, adopting a new role, and radicalization. It should be possible to see how Ed Husain's journey fits this trajectory.

What is important is that there be a pervasive environment that helps Islamists gradually indoctrinate vulnerable people. The role of social and personal contacts is of special importance in the recruitment process. I have tried to bring to the forefront the extent to which religious organizations and social networks help activists mobilize resources, and engage in culturing and persuasion techniques. Equally important to appreciate is how low risk activism paves the way for high risk activities. Notably, there are no clear boundaries which divide these two levels of activism.

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<sup>182</sup> Silber & Bhatt, "Radicalization in the West: The Home-grown Threat," 9.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 43.

My intent has been to explain how the contagion of radicalization spreads. I want to now draw attention to how a small number of Islamists, with smartly contextualized ideas, given a receptive environment can spread their influence at a god's speed.

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## IV. PROLIFERATION OF RADICALISTS' IDEAS IN THE UK

### A. INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter, I highlighted a few peculiarities of Muslim societies in the UK: Muslims have dwelled in certain areas; within the context of larger British society, Muslims communities are closed and conservative; and Muslims have their own food shops, mosques, schools, and recreational spots. Mostly, the Muslims see this distinctiveness as a defense mechanism against racial and religious discrimination. This pervasive environment in turn facilitates the process of religious indoctrination that Islamists initiate through social outreach activism.<sup>184</sup>

Activists employ existing social networks to germinate a sense of crisis among contacts in discussions and subtle interactions. During this entire process mostly personal relationships are exploited, and peer group friendships and kinship connections prove especially useful.<sup>185</sup> Special attention is paid towards framing ideas so as to make them stickier. Word-of-mouth is the main medium of communication and persuasion. Islamists select places like mosques, universities, and Muslims' recreation spots where they recruit people by engaging them in discussion. Their method of engagement includes all the techniques of modern canvassing.

When we dig deeper, what we find are three mechanisms worth further investigation. First is the presence of "influentials," a minority of individuals in the shape of Islamists who influence an exceptional number of their peers. Second is the idea of stickiness engineering, involving deliberate efforts to package information that resonates with the public's lived experience. Third involves the environment or context and focuses on the readiness of the audience to receive

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<sup>184</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 11.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 3.

the message. All three of these come close to the mechanism Malcolm Gladwell describes in his book *The Tipping Point: the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor, and the Law of Context*.

In this Chapter, I will attempt to employ Gladwell's theoretical notions of spreading new ideas to illustrate how radicalists' ideas proliferated in the UK like a social epidemic.

## **B. THE LAW OF THE FEW**

The Muslim Community in the UK, comprising migrants from different countries, resembles a society that is fragmented into clusters of individuals having similar characteristics. "The Muslims who migrated in the UK prefer to develop social associations with their own countrymen—friendships and marriages are done within the same community."<sup>186</sup> Interestingly, the observed mechanism of preferential attachment tends to be linear. In his book, *The Islamist*, Ed Husain writes that his friendship with Falik allowed him to connect to more people, and new social clusters like the YMO.<sup>187</sup> Throughout his journey inside different radical networks, Ed Husain was always influenced by a few people. We find ample evidence in *The Islamist* that the proliferation of radicalism has been governed by Milgram's "Six Degrees of Separation"—a very small number of people are linked to everyone else in a few steps. Although the Islamists Husain describes operate in different distinct hubs, like YMO, Hizb ut-Tahrir, or al-Muhajiroun, their frequent interaction with each other enables them to recruit new people from the vast pool of society.<sup>188</sup>

Another factor is the role of word-of-mouth with respect to social ties and referral behavior. At both the macro and micro levels, the medium of information

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<sup>186</sup> Alam, *Made in Bradford*, 17.

<sup>187</sup> Hussain, *The Islamist*, 23.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 113.

propagation has mostly remained word-of-mouth. Gladwell likewise highlights interpersonal connection through word-of-mouth and notes that some people are more influential than others.

### **1. Interpersonal Connections Through Word-of-Mouth**

One of the most widely accepted notions related to behavior in networked societies is that word-of-mouth communication plays an important role in shaping people's attitudes and behaviors.<sup>189</sup> For example, "word-of-mouth is the most important source of influence in the purchase of household goods and food products. It was seven times as effective as newspapers and magazines, four times as effective as personal selling, and twice as effective as radio advertising in influencing consumers to switch brands."<sup>190</sup>

People pass on all kinds of information to each other all the time through word-of-mouth. "But it's only in a rare instance that such exchanges ignite the word-of-mouth epidemic."<sup>191</sup> While highlighting this anomaly, Gladwell attributes the start of a word-of-mouth epidemic to "involvement of people with a particular rare set of social gifts."<sup>192</sup>

One finds illustrations of this in Ed Husain's book. Ed Husain was mostly influenced by messages that came to him through word-of-mouth. *Dawa* and Islamists' activism heavily relied upon word-of-mouth communication. Though Husain and other activists started their canvassing among those with whom they had "stronger ties," we find them quickly approaching almost anyone and everyone. Similarly, during *halaqas* and *taleemi jalsas* sessions, local leaders

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<sup>189</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 89.

<sup>190</sup> Yan Jin, "Comparative Study: Does the Word-of-mouth Communications and Opinion Leadership Model Fit Epinions on the Internet?" University of Missouri, Columbia, 6, [http://www.empiricom.org/glensite/PDF\\_articles/Epinions.pdf](http://www.empiricom.org/glensite/PDF_articles/Epinions.pdf) (accessed February 24, 2009).

<sup>191</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), 33.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

within a closed, networked environment indoctrinated specific ideas through word-of-mouth.<sup>193</sup> Due to their interactive nature, these sessions had a huge influence.

From the standpoint of word-of-mouth communications, the above discussion confirms Mark Granovetter's theory that "the strength of weak ties provides a promising explanation of the process by which word-of-mouth behavior at a micro level is linked to macro level phenomena."<sup>194</sup> "Stronger ties" exist among people who have close relations, like family members and close friends, whereas "weaker ties" describes relations with general people through referral connections, like persons in the neighborhood. Between the weaker and stronger ties, Islamists pay more attention to the "weaker ties." For them, the significance of "weaker ties" arises due to their important bridging function that allows information to travel from one densely knit clump of already connected people to other segments of society.

## **2. Societal Links—Some People are More Influential**

In the 1960s, Stanley Milgram conducted an experiment to answer what is known as the Small World problem: how are humans connected? This led to his famous concept of "Six Degrees of Separation."<sup>195</sup> Explaining Milgram's Concept, Gladwell writes that "Six Degrees of Separation" does not mean that everyone is linked to everyone else in just six steps. Instead, it means that a very small number of people are linked to everyone else in a few steps, and the rest of us are linked to the world through those special few.<sup>196</sup> Gladwell further writes that these people on whom we rely more heavily than we realize act as crucial

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<sup>193</sup> Husain, *The Islamist*, 123 & 131.

<sup>194</sup> Jacqueline Johnson Brown & Peter H. Reingen, "Social Ties and Word-of-Mouth Referral Behavior," *The Journal of Consumer Research* 14, no. 3 (December 1987): 352, <http://www.ProQuest.org/> (accessed February 22, 2009).

<sup>195</sup> Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 35.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.



societal links; they are people with a special gift for bringing the world together.<sup>197</sup> Gladwell characterizes these individuals as connectors, mavens, and salesmen.

**a. Connectors**

What makes someone a connector? The first and most obvious criterion is that Connectors know lots of people. Sprinkled among every walk of life, in other words, are a handful of people with a truly extraordinary knack of making friends and acquaintances.<sup>198</sup> They master what sociologists call the “weak tie,” a friendly yet casual social connection. Connectors are important for more than simply the number of people they know. Their importance is also a function of the kinds of people they know.<sup>199</sup> Connectors are people whom all of us can reach in only a few steps because, for one reason or another, they manage to occupy many different worlds, subcultures, and niches, which is a function of something intrinsic to their personality, some combination of curiosity, self-confidence, sociability, and energy.<sup>200</sup> Ed Husain, Majid Nawaz (Ed Husain’s “musharif” in Newham), Amir Nawaz, and Islamic Society of Britain (ISB) activist Zahid Amin are some examples of Connectors. Each one exhibits another characteristic of being a Connector; he has the “uncanny genius of being at the centre of events” and has a foot in many different worlds.<sup>201</sup>

Gladwell’s Connectors establish both stronger and weaker ties, but a critical review of Islamists’ network topology suggests that weaker ties are again more important since these serve as bridges, linking closely knit network segments. It is through these weaker ties that the word-of-mouth epidemic proliferates.

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<sup>197</sup> Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 38.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 56.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that Connectors are the only people who matter in spreading radicalism. After all, who taught Connectors their Islamist ideology? In examining this social epidemic, it becomes clear that just as there are people who connect people via an Islamist ideology, there are also people who could be termed religious information specialists—the Mavens.

**b. Mavens**

Mavens are the second category of people who contribute to word-of-mouth epidemics. A Maven is someone who accumulates knowledge. Mavens know what is happening around them.<sup>202</sup> What is critical about Mavens is that they are not passive collectors of information but are individuals who, after acquiring particular knowledge, want to tell everyone about it too.<sup>203</sup>

In *The Islamist*, Mavens are Ed Husain's religious "mentors" and *Ulema* (*Ulema* are those who have knowledge). Siraj of East London Mosque, Omar Bakri and Mohammad al-Masri of Hizb ut-Tahrir, and Hamza Yousuf Hanson of ISB were the prominent clerics who could be termed Mavens. They had the knowledge and the social skills to start a word-of-mouth epidemic, though what really sat them apart was not so much what they knew, but their desire to help others, which turned out to be a very effective way to gain others' attention. A "Maven is someone who solves his own problems—his own emotional needs—by solving other people's problems."<sup>204</sup> This trait was quite explicit in all the above-mentioned individuals and made them appear selfless—an essential attribute of "influentials."

Mavens are more influential than Connectors, due to their ability to make a particular case so emphatically that listeners take their advice. "A Maven is not the kind of person who wants to twist your arm. To be a Maven is to be a

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<sup>202</sup> Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 60.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 63.

teacher.”<sup>205</sup> Mavens and Connectors have different personalities and act for different reasons. But, they both have the power to spark a word-of-mouth epidemic.<sup>206</sup> Mavens are data banks; they provide the message. Connectors are the social glue; they spread it.

### **c. Salesmen**

The one thing that a Maven is not is a persuader.<sup>207</sup> For that, there is another group of people—Salesmen—with skills to persuade us when we are otherwise unconvinced about what we are hearing.<sup>208</sup> Salesmen are as critical to the “tipping” of word-of-mouth epidemics as Connectors and Mavens. The attributes that facilitate the Salesmen’s ability to persuade others is their capacity to build trust and rapport in five to ten minutes, when this would take most people half an hour. They engage in what is called motor mimicry to emotionally effect others.<sup>209</sup> Gladwell argues that emotion works outside-in, making it possible for some people to exert an enormous amount of influence over others.<sup>210</sup>

Salesmen are emotionally contagious, which makes them excellent persuaders. In UK Muslim communities, we do not find this category of people as a separate entity. Rather, some of the individuals from the other two groups (Connectors and Mavens) undertake Salesman tasks. Once recruits are indoctrinated, and as they adopt their new role as Islamists, they start canvassing as Salesmen. The radical organization they join trains them in persuasion techniques. People are selected for these tasks during *Tarbiyat*. Those who do this job efficiently later become Connectors, and some of these end up as Mavens as well.

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<sup>205</sup> Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 69.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 86.

## C. STICKINESS FACTOR

According to Gladwell's Law of the Few, there are exceptional people out there who are capable of starting word-of-mouth epidemics. All you have to do is to find them. The lesson of stickiness is similar. There is a simple way to package information that, under the right circumstances, can make it irresistible. All you have to do is find it. By carefully structuring and formatting material to enhance its attractiveness, people engage in stickiness engineering.

Chip and Dan Heath in their book, *Made to Stick*, identify six different tools to make a message stickier. I will use these to elaborate how Islamists achieved stickiness in their message.

### 1. Simplicity

A compact message carrying the "core" can be defined as simple. Finding the "core" requires stripping an idea down to its most critical essence. To get to the core, we have to weed out superfluous and tangential elements.<sup>211</sup> Phrases like, "Islam is the solution,"<sup>212</sup> "Allah's Law in Allah's Land,"<sup>213</sup> "God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve,"<sup>214</sup> are some examples of messages that are short like sound bites, yet carry proverbial meanings.

Many of the Islamists' sticky ideas are actually "generative" metaphors in disguise. Generative metaphors, like proverbs, derive their power from a clever substitution: they substitute something easy to think about for something more difficult.<sup>215</sup> For example, "Islam is the Solution" and "Allah's Law in Allah's Land" offer the listener tangible, easily processed statements that can be used for guidance in complex, emotionally fraught situations. Such simple ideas are

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<sup>211</sup> Chip Heath & Dan Heath, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (New York: Random House, 2007), 27.

<sup>212</sup> Hussain, *The Islamist*, 51.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 61.

especially helpful in guiding individual decisions in an environment where people share common beliefs, offering rules of thumb for expected behavior.

## 2. Unexpectedness

How do we get our audience to pay attention to our ideas, and how do we maintain their interest when it takes time to get the ideas across? According to the Heath brothers, the most basic way to grab someone's attention is to break a pattern. Our brain is designed to be keenly aware of changes. The Heaths say that smart designers are well aware of this tendency and make sure that, when products require users to pay attention, something changes.<sup>216</sup>

It is possible to use surprise—an emotion whose function is to increase alertness and cause focus—to grab people's attention. But, surprise does not last. In order to ensure their idea would endure, the Islamists instead generated interest and curiosity by employing the *Gap Theory* and arousing curiosity. According to the *Gap Theory*, we need to open gaps in people's knowledge before we close them. The Islamists believed it was a mistake to give the people the facts right away. First, they made people realize they lacked facts by posing a question or puzzle that would confront the listener with a gap in his knowledge.<sup>217</sup> In 1994, the Hizb in the UK drew people's attention by suggesting that something momentous was about to happen in the Middle East. They propagated the notion that the *Khilafat* would soon be announced in some Arab country. For publicity purposes, they put stickers everywhere stating: *Khilafat—Coming Soon to a Country Near You?* The message attracted a lot of attention and many people who otherwise would not have taken an interest asked what this was all about.

Run of the mill ideas are the enemy of sticky messages. As the Heaths write, "When messages sound like common sense, they float gently in one ear

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<sup>216</sup> Husain, *The Islamist*, 65.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

and out the other. Because they intuitively know what you want to tell them.”<sup>218</sup> Islamists always tried to come up with innovative ways to convey messages. When they could not tamper with the message itself, they devised new propagation techniques.

### **3. Concreteness**

What makes a message “concrete”? If speaking concretely is the only way to ensure that our ideas will mean the same thing to everyone in our audience, how can we convey our ideas in concrete language?

Abstraction is the luxury of the expert. Concrete language helps people, especially novices, understand new concepts. According to the Heaths, if you have to teach an idea to a room full of people, and you are not certain what they know, concreteness is the only safe language to use as it is something that helps you construct building blocks on people’s existing knowledge and perceptions.

Islamists always build their argument around some religious perception or set of fundamental Muslims beliefs. For example:

*Allah is our Lord*

*Mohammad is our Leader*

*The Quran is our Constitution*

*Jihad is our way*

*Martyrdom is our Desire* <sup>219</sup>

If we analyze this message, we will appreciate that most Muslims cannot object to anything said in it. It covers the entire spectrum of the Muslim’s life. It is easy to remember, being short, yet so meaningful that you can spend hours discussing each line.

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<sup>218</sup> Husain, *The Islamist*, 72.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 52.

What is it about concreteness that makes ideas stick? The answer lies in the nature of our memories. Many of us have a sense that remembering something is a bit like putting it in storage. There are some terms that get saved in our minds and any reference to these by others adds strength to their arguments. For instance, the words *jahilia*, *Kuffar*, *Mushriqeen*, and *Khilafat* resonate deeply for most Muslims. Concreteness through such references creates a shared “foundation” on which people can come together and collaborate. “Everybody feels comfortable that they are tackling the same challenge.”<sup>220</sup>

#### **4. Credibility**

How do we make people believe our ideas?

If we are trying to persuade a skeptical audience to “buy” a new message we are usually fighting an uphill battle against a lifetime of other people’s personal experience and biases. In such situations, we seldom have an external authority who can vouch for our message; most of the time our message has to vouch for itself. It must have “internal credibility.”<sup>221</sup> What is unusual about the Islamist case in the UK is that Islamists simply manipulated their message and packaged it in a wider belief system that people already know. Their message had the desired credibility due to its link to the audience’s beliefs.

Another factor that made the Islamists’ message credible was the stature of the messenger. Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen were people already trusted for their knowledge. Islamists employed their networking ability to effect. Also, the people who preached and invited others to engage in jihad were mostly those who themselves had experienced jihad in Afghanistan, Bosnia, or Iraq.

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<sup>220</sup> Heaths, *Made to Stick*, 123.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

## 5. Emotions

How do we get people to care about our ideas?

The Heaths write that sometimes the hardest part is to find the right emotion to harness. They theorize that thinking about statistics, for instance, shifts people into a more analytical frame of mind. When people think analytically they are less likely to think emotionally.<sup>222</sup> Hence, to influence people, we need to demonstrate how our ideas are associated with things that people already care about. “We appeal to their self-interest, but we also appeal to their identities—not only the people they are right now but to the people they would like to be.”<sup>223</sup>

The Islamists did all this. Their messages were emotionally charged, were intensely associated with things people already cared about, and always carried an appeal to their identity. For example, one of the leaflets being distributed by Hizb ut-Tahrir in January 2009 carried the following message: “Mobilising the troops for battle in response to Gaza slaughter, is Mandatory on the rulers, else it amounts to treason with Allah, His Prophet, and the Believers!”<sup>224</sup>

## 6. Stories

How do we get people to act on our ideas?

The oldest tool of influence in human history is to tell stories.<sup>225</sup> An emotional idea makes people care and the right story makes people act.<sup>226</sup> People do not want more information. To borrow from Gladwell, people want faith—faith in you, your goals, your success, in the story you tell. Facts do not

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<sup>222</sup> Heaths, *Made to Stick*, 167.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>224</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir: The Liberation Party – Britain, <http://www.hizb.org.uk/hizb/resources/leaflets.html> (accessed March 1, 2009).

<sup>225</sup> Annette Simons, *The Story Factor: Inspiration, Influence, and Persuasion Through the Arts of Storytelling* (Cambridge: Perseus Books, 2006), xix.

<sup>226</sup> Heaths, *Made to Stick*, 206.



give birth to faith. Faith needs a story to sustain it—a meaningful story that inspires people to believe in you and renews hope that your ideas indeed offer what you promise.<sup>227</sup>

When you want to influence someone, trust becomes the connection that serves as a conduit for your message. Other methods of influence—persuasion, bribery, or charismatic appeals—are push strategies. Telling a story is a pull strategy.<sup>228</sup> If your story is good enough, people of their own free will come to the conclusion they can trust you and the message you bring.<sup>229</sup>

## **D. THE POWER OF CONTEXT**

Epidemics are sensitive to the conditions, meaning the circumstances of the times and places in which they occur. Context—which can be defined as the whole background to a particular situation, issue, or problem—has a strong influence on participants. In his book, *Medium is the Message*, Marshall McLuhan writes: “Our environment compels commitment and participation. We have become irrevocably involved with, and responsible for, each other.”<sup>230</sup> Pushing his argument further, McLuhan says “the environment that man creates becomes his medium for defining his role in it.”<sup>231</sup>

### **1. Radicalism as an Epidemic**

This idea of radicalization as an epidemic may seem a little strange. We can say that Islamists’ radicalism proliferated like a contagion, but it is not clear that radicalization follows the same rules that fashions or fads do. Fashion trends involve relatively straightforward and simple things—a product and a message.

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<sup>227</sup> Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 3.

<sup>228</sup> Simons, *The Story Factor*, 3.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>230</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Message* (New York: Random House, 1969), 24.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 157.

Islamists' radicalism, on the other hand, is not a single discrete thing, but a phenomenon used to describe an almost impossibly varied and complicated set of behaviors.

Radical activists can face serious consequences for their actions. What activists do often puts them at great personal peril. As with crime, it does not seem that the psychological predisposition to break the law would be transmitted casually, from one person to another. Yet, somehow in the UK, this is exactly what has occurred. Between the beginning and the middle of the 1990s, the UK saw the spread of radicalism that tipped off during the end of the 1990s and continued into the early 2000s. There were just as many religiously inclined people living in the UK at the peak of this radicalism as before, but for some reason a small number of these individuals suddenly dominated the environment.

The incidents that took place during this period had a huge impact on Muslim society, and in a big way helped Islamists to propagate radicalism. The bits that formulated the environmental mosaic for the British Muslim community at the time included: hostility toward the Saudis for allowing the U.S. and other "non-Muslim" forces to be stationed in the Kingdom—an act many considered a betrayal of Islam; hostility to the politics of western governments and specifically the British Government in the domestic sphere; and antagonism toward the British Government for its refusal to ban Salman Rushdie's book, *The Satanic Verses*. Also, there was Britain's involvement in the first Gulf War, its rejection of military action to aid Bosnian Muslims, and its commitment to the U.S. GWOT.

## **2. Broken Window Theory**

According to James Q. Wilson and George Kelling, if a window is broken and left unrepaired, people walking by will conclude that no one cares and no one is in charge. Soon, more windows will be broken, and the sense of anarchy will spread from the building to the street, sending a signal that anything goes.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 141.

The Broken Window Theory can help us understand the UK Muslim community's radicalization. When people started displaying an unusual religious inclination in the 1990s by setting up exclusive foundations in mosques, canvassing on behalf of extremist thoughts, and openly espousing radicalism, the UK Government did not do anything. As Ed Husain writes, "Britain offered the Hizb the freedom to express its ideas freely and recruit uninhibitedly. The Hizb was legal in Britain, but illegal in the Arab World."<sup>233</sup> As a result, people in particular Muslim communities thought their activism was the right way to publicly express themselves. When this public expression spread from the close quarters of mosques to the streets without eliciting a response from the authorities, it sent the signal that "anything goes." In turn, that rendered radicalism as contagious as crime, which can start with a broken window and spread through an entire community.

### **3. Broken Window Theory & the Power of Context**

In essence, Malcolm Gladwell applies the Broken Window theory to the Power of Context. Both are based on the premise that "an epidemic can be tipped, by tinkering with the smallest details of the immediate environment."<sup>234</sup>

In order to understand the relationship it is important to figure out what the Broken Window and Power of Context suggest in the framework of radicalization. Both suggest that a radical activist is someone acutely sensitive to his environment, who is alert to all kinds of cues, and who is prompted to commit to Islamist theory based on his perception of the world around him. For example, Ed Husain's bias toward religion was grounded in his early home life. He moved along the path of radicalization slowly. Small incidents against Muslims kept reinforcing his belief that the West in fact was at war with Muslims. Consequently, Husain and many like him started idealizing those who had fought the Afghan Jihad. The UK Government's silence about Jihadis from Britain

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<sup>233</sup> Husain, *The Islamist*, 87.

<sup>234</sup> Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 146.

encouraged the younger generation to follow their example. No one figured out in the mid-and late 90s that these trends one day would lead to violent radicalism.

The Power of Context is an environmental argument. It says that behavior is a function of social context. It also says that what really matters is little things.<sup>235</sup> Duncan Watts explains this relationship more succinctly. He poses a question: Why could we not kick-start a particular trend every time?<sup>236</sup> His answer: “trends’ success not always depends on the person who starts it, but on how susceptible the environment is overall to the trend...if the environment is ready to embrace a trend, almost anyone can start one and if it isn’t, then almost no one can.”<sup>237</sup>

#### **4. Context of Narrative**

While constructing a plot, the narrator establishes the context for his/her story but the words that the storyteller uses in the story certainly go a long way towards establishing context as well. Nevertheless, it is the relationship with the audience that the teller establishes early on that sets the narrative context. “This relationship is highly dependant on attributes of the situation—how relevant is the environment to the narrative.”<sup>238</sup> Political science research has found that people are far more critical of data that opposes their accepted beliefs and much more accepting of confirming data, even when weak or suspect. When the audience knows the context of a story, it essentially adopts and accepts the point-of-view of the narrator. From this point on, the storyteller assumes both power and responsibility, to either give them what it expects or what it does not expect.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 151.

<sup>236</sup> Duncan J. Watts, “Challenging the Influentials Hypothesis,” *WOMMA Measuring Word of Mouth*, Volume 3, 207, <http://www.ProQuest.org/> (accessed February 19, 2009).

<sup>237</sup> Clive Thompson, “Is Tipping Point Toast?” 5, <http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/122/is-the-tipping-point-toast.html> (accessed on 28 January, 2009).

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Kevin Brooks, “The Context Quintet: Narrative Elements Applied to Context Awareness,” 2, <http://www.Jstore.org/> (accessed February 15, 2009).

When we are trying to make an idea, attitude, or product tip, we are trying to change our audience in some small yet critical respect: we are trying to infect them, sweep them up in our epidemic, convert them from hostility to acceptance. That can be done through the influence of special kinds of people, people with extraordinary personal connections—this is the Law of the Few. It can also be done by changing the content of communications, by making a message so memorable that it sticks in people’s mind and compels them to action—this is the Stickiness Factor. Both of these laws make intuitive sense.

But we also need to remember that small changes in context can be just as important in tipping epidemics. This brings us back to context. Once you understand that the context matters and that relatively smaller elements in the environment can serve as Tipping Points, then outcomes can be altered. Environmental Tipping Points are things that we can change.<sup>240</sup> We, for instance, can fix Islamists’ organizations and overshadow their message with our own message by planning small changes in their messages and their activism, as the next chapter will propose.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point*, is about social epidemics. The laws he describes—the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor, and the Law of Context—are not scientifically proven laws of human nature. He himself relies on rhetoric and examples that we normally come across in our daily life to make his own “theory” stick. In fact, what he presents is largely common sense: if you want to spread a message, the audience has to be ready for the message (the context); the message has to resonate with people (stickiness); and the message must be spread through the right people (the few).

These factors, if skillfully manipulated, can help spread information at an accelerated rate. Gladwell’s theory, though substantiated through anecdotal

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<sup>240</sup> Brooks, “The Context Quintet: Narrative Elements Applied to Context Awareness,” 167.

evidence, provides a workable framework for understanding how the proliferation of radicalism has taken place among UK Muslim communities. This chapter has detailed how effectively Gladwell's theory explains the start of radicalism among Muslims in the UK. By following the simple rules of marketing a small number of Islamists made their message credible, persuasive, and stickier. Word-of-mouth and interpersonal connections were critical, as was context and the environment.

## **V. DE-RADICALIZATION AND SPREADING MODERATE IDEAS**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Can we reverse the tide of Islamist radicalization in the UK? What would be the basic contours of our proposed de-radicalization campaign? How would we construct the most suitable narrative? Finally, can we proliferate our ideas to support our narrative based upon Gladwell's notion of a tipping point? These are some of the questions that I intend to address in this chapter.

Thus far, I have tried to describe a general pattern of radicalization found among UK Muslims. Detailed analysis of Ed Husain's book, *The Islamist*, and subsequent validation of its findings point to a distinct path for Muslim radicalization. In Chapter IV, I described the techniques Islamists employ to spread their extremist ideology during this process of radicalization. In the current chapter it is time to grapple with how we can reverse the process of radicalization and spread ideas of moderation within the British Muslim community.

There are indications that the majority of Muslims in the UK are growing frustrated with the radicals among them. If we accept this argument, it means there is a cognitive opening for diffusion of a counter-idea. This counter-idea should not necessarily be the exact opposite of Islamism. Indeed, if it is couched in purely theological terms it would run a high chance of being knocked down by radicals on theological grounds. Ideally, it should instead be an idea that counters radicalization, yet avoids the possibility of a direct theological confrontation. At the same time, such an idea should address real grievances and help Muslims rescue their younger generation from championing extremist and intolerant views.

This chapter recommends strengthening “family” as one such potential counter-radicalization tool or idea. In doing so, I explain why pursuing the strengthening of family values should take the sting out of Islamists’ activism and thwart the process of radicalization.

## **B. REVERSING THE TIDE OF RADICALISM**

Chapter III highlighted the Muslims’ trauma of victimization in different parts of the world, and describes how this resonated with Muslims’ personal feelings of exclusion from broader British society, leading to collective dissonance and a cognitive opening. These experiences enabled Islamists to exploit this cognitive opening and push fellow Muslims toward radicalism. In that sense, radicalism itself acts much like an innovation. According to Everett Rogers in *Diffusion of Innovations*, an innovation does not encompass any new knowledge. It is instead based upon knowledge that most may have known for some time, but have yet to actually embrace or reject.

It takes persuasion to get people to adopt an innovation, whose “newness” often amounts to simply seeing the same world (or set of problems) from a new perspective. Rogers calls this adaptive phenomenon “reinvention,” and asserts that an innovation diffuses more rapidly when it can be reinvented. An innovation will also diffuse more rapidly when its adoption is more likely to be sustained. Indeed, this exactly describes what we have seen with Islamism in the UK—thanks to Mavens, Connectors, and Salesman, the stickiness factor, and a conducive environment.<sup>241</sup>

For almost a decade, a small percentage of Muslims have been following the radicalists’ path. Today, the Islamists’ innovation of the 1990s has come full circle to reach a point where its adopters have started to become isolated from mainstream society. The violent ends of this innovation have created a distaste for it. This can be confirmed and substantiated through the findings of a survey of

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<sup>241</sup> Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition (New York: Free Press, 2003), 169-185.



UK students' opinions, *Islam on Campus* (Appendix). This survey is the most comprehensive survey ever undertaken on Muslim student opinion in the UK. Based on a specially commissioned YouGov poll of 14,000 students, augmented by fieldwork and interviews, it clearly shows that Muslims who once espoused extremist and intolerant thoughts have grown dissatisfied and are questioning the adoption-versus-rejection decision previously made in favor of radicalization.<sup>242</sup>

Examining the survey results, we find quite a number of students engaging in what Rogers calls a “discontinuance” phenomenon—a decision to reject an innovation after having previously adopted it. Sixty-eight percent of Muslim students consider themselves to be British, while 78 percent believe it is possible to be both Muslim and British. Likewise, only 4 percent of them think it is justified to kill when it comes to preserving their religion.<sup>243</sup> This could be a result of the dissatisfaction that comes about when an innovation is inappropriate for individuals and does not result in any perceived advantages over other alternatives.<sup>244</sup> This state of dissonance that Muslims in the UK suffer from seems to be due to their frustration with not finding the right means through which to redress their grievances. Here, then is *our* cognitive opening. Here is a situation that can potentially be rescued by diffusing a new innovation.

The following discussion will debate the possibility and prospect that two very different kinds of idea could help counter radicalization among Muslims in the UK. One alternative is to theologically propagate a softer image of religion—something along the lines of “Islamic Enlightened Moderation.”<sup>245</sup> The second is

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<sup>242</sup> “Islam on Campus: A survey of UK Student Opinions,” [http://www.socialcohesion.co.uk/files/1231525079\\_1.pdf](http://www.socialcohesion.co.uk/files/1231525079_1.pdf) (accessed January 7, 2009).

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 190.

<sup>245</sup> Pervez Musharraf, “A Plea for Enlightened Moderation,” *The Washington Post*, June 1, 2004, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A5081-2004May31.html> (accessed March 16, 2009).

to help strengthen the Muslim community by reinvigorating family values. Both these alternatives could be pursued independently or diffused side by side as described below.

## **C. CONTOURS OF DE-RADICALIZATION CAMPAIGN**

### **1. Problems with Calling for a Theological Innovation**

#### ***a. Need for an Alternate Community***

As illustrated in Chapter IV, Islamists have an elaborate system by which they spread their message, and which has developed and gained people's trust over a long period of time. The Mavens, Connectors, and Salesmen who assist with this are individuals who are not necessarily Islamists themselves, but almost all have a bias toward religion and being religious. They, like any good religious believers, adhere to certain beliefs that would be very difficult to alter. Here, I am not suggesting that these beliefs can never change; what I am saying is that people's religious beliefs evolve through a long natural process—radicalization of a small segment of society simply hooks onto this. Hence, if we want to bring about some change in religious thinking among the UK's Muslims, this too can only be done over a prolonged period and through inculcation of an altogether different mindset. That, in turn, will require an alternate community to support the proliferation of our new theological ideas. Yet, creation or identification of an alternate community would present a huge problem.

*Enlightened Moderation* is the quality or state of becoming rational or having reasoning power, or being able to think clearly and make decisions based on reason rather than emotions. The concept of *Enlightened Moderation* was proposed by the former President of Pakistan, Pervez Musharraf. The intent

is that enlightened moderation should apply to all spheres of life, but most importantly to practicing Islam. The aim is that Islam be practiced moderately, as opposed to practicing a fundamentalist version.

Presently, there are very few Mavens who could act as beacons of *Islamic Enlightened Moderation*. But even if there were such experts and we parachuted them into the UK from abroad, imported Mavens would require time to establish their status. When it comes to Connectors, we are somewhat better off. But still, social networks among UK Muslims are dominated by those willing to promote the Islamist message. It would be futile to try to transmit an opposing theological message through these same Connectors. Lastly, where would we find Salesmen? The most vocal and active Salesmen are already committed to the Islamists' message. If they wanted to "sell" moderation, presumably they already would have done that; but, they know such ideas would not get them enough support. Besides, there is skepticism among Muslims regarding any new interpretation; it would be very difficult for the persuaders to introduce new theological reasoning.

#### ***b. Potential for Backfire***

Though the poll results exhibited in the Appendix clearly show that the vast majority of Muslims in the UK espouse moderate religious views, any new religious interpretation would be looked at as an innovation in the field of theology and could prove counter-productive by appearing to create *fitna* or *bid'ah* (heresy or innovation). Any new interpretation of religious thought, especially one supported by the UK government, cannot be expected to draw much of an audience. It could, in fact, end up doing quite the opposite. It might give renewed energy/impetus to the Islamists' fading narrative, especially in the absence of a robust alternate community to support or promote the new religious thinking. Hence, to counter radicalization our idea should not be one that the radicals could counter on theological grounds. Instead, it should be one that they *cannot* theologially dispute at all.

As discussed in Chapters III and IV, for an idea to spread requires a conducive environment; the Power of Context is important. In an environment where most UK Muslims still feel the West is hostile toward Islam, it would be a mistake to go forward with any plan that counts on a theological innovation—and one that Islamists can construe as Westerners trying to change Islam. Just as no fashion store should expect to sell great coats with much success in the middle of summer, one must not try to sell a new idea about a theological reinterpretation in the wrong climate.

**c. *Addressing British Government Sensitivities***

As part of the overall context, it is also important to understand how the British general public looks at this issue. Some segments of British society, to include the government, might not be very forthcoming and comfortable with or supportive of the idea of sponsoring or spreading religious ideas. Besides, Britons might find these threatening. Islam, after all, remains a religion practiced by a thin minority of the population. Giving unnecessary importance to Islam might create problems within British society, which strives to appear ecumenical and multi-cultural. Similarly, too much prominence to Islam might not be politically feasible for authorities since there is already an argument made by many non-Muslims that any concession in terms of religion might embolden the Islamists and threaten the security of the UK government and the English people.

**2. *Strengthening Family Can Counter Radicalization***

**a. *Strengths of Argument***

(1) Strong Family Values: Family values are considered a strength among Muslims, especially in the case of South Asian and Middle Eastern families. Therefore, the push to strengthen the family as a basic building block of a non-violent community would be something that would not be considered alien to their traditions. These families normally believe that when

parents directly monitor and/or supervise their children's interaction with peers, they facilitate and regulate the development of the children's social skills. Parents consciously and subconsciously influence their youngsters' reference group orientations in an effort to shape their values and attitudes. As I have described in Chapter III, family elders are apprehensive about the prospects of their children losing their forefathers' traditions. For them, a call to rebuild Muslim society around families would be a welcome step. Similarly, since the elders themselves have experience living within tightly bonded families, it would be easy for them to adapt and organize their lives accordingly.

(2) Family as a Guide: The Islamists have developed their community to control and monitor their activists' activities. As Ed Husain's autobiography and other literature shows us, the sense of belonging and warmth the activists enjoy is stronger than that they feel for their own families. This is primarily because their parents are either too busy to spare some time for them, or parents are considered by their grown-up children to be too traditionalist. Because they are seen to be old-fashioned, they cannot provide the necessary guidance regarding day-to-day problems. Feeling neglected when it came to how to handle the challenges of adolescence, Ed Husain, for instance, sought guidance from Islamists—and later did the same for other Muslims.

If the family system was reinvigorated and supported by the mosques, parents could win back control from the Islamists. This would assist parents to monitor standards of acceptable conduct, maintain limits, and encourage participation in some activities and discourage participation in others. The aim here would be to bring Muslim children back within the fold of their parents' tolerant and non-violent religion.

(3) Providing Social Warmth: Reinvigorating and Strengthening the extended family system would provide social warmth. Belonging to an extended family should make children feel secure, not stifled. By encouraging more family oriented events, the community would ensure that, with lots of cousins, aunts, and uncles, youth do not feel alone. In large extended families,

they will always be able to find a trusted friend with whom they can share their personal feelings. When every member of the family can look inwards and realize he has a place of value in the family mosaic, much needed harmony, which most young Muslims now miss, would be available. Also, and just as important, the more warmth and significance families retain, the less the lack of Britons' warmth should matter and, as a result, the less alienated youth should need to feel.

Not only would strengthening this family connectivity reduce the Islamists' ability to dominate, but would make the family the cocoon in which adaptation to living in the West is best handled: families make traditions together. It is important for Britons to see that Muslim parents want their children to grow up well educated and well mannered to perform well in the broader UK society, while still retaining a non-defiant but proud sense of identity.

(4) Family Support: A vigorous family-based social life will not only reduce the dominance of the Islamists' networks, but will also provide parents and other family elders an excellent means by which to engage the younger family members and fully exploit familiarity and word-of-mouth persuasion mechanisms for raising respectful young people. Father, mother, elder brothers, sisters, and even grandparents will all be there to provide the necessary support and guidance to the family's adolescents. Some might argue that persuasion is best carried out through "weaker ties." I agree that this is true to an extent, but it by no means suggests that at any stage in one's life parents and other caring family members should see their influence diminished.

Indeed the stretch (or breadth and depth) of extended families also means that the influence of adults will remain strong, since parents will have other adults to rely on. They will be able to gather strength from numbers, which in turn means they should be able to relax their individual vigilance. This should help ease tensions with their own children. Parental warmth, respectful treatment, and clearly defined limits will likewise let adolescents know their parents care for and about them.

(5) Overcoming Identity Crisis: Weak and in some cases almost non-existent family bonds have left young Muslims in Britain caught between the beliefs and networks of their parents and those of the host society. This confusion, along with feelings of disenfranchisement and discrimination, creates an identity crisis. Reinvigorating the extended family would help youth overcome the trauma of their identity crisis by granting them a firm sense of belonging to a network of peers, in the form of cousins and other relatives who would help put family first. Muslim youth, in this way, would be connected with the wider British society through having a sense of place and belonging to something.

(6) British Societal Support: Non-Muslim Britons have an equal stake in containing this contagion of radicalization among Muslims. They should look at such a counter-radicalization program favorably. Many Britons consider the decline of family values a problem country-wide. One can assume that most Britons would fully support British government assistance in reviving strong families in Muslim communities.

**b. Weaknesses of Argument**

(1) Fears of Importing Foreign Influence: Strengthening the family system might make it seem difficult to fully merge Muslims into British society. Their attachment to tradition might lead to further exclusion of their community. There are also chances that, by strengthening traditional family bonds, Muslims in the UK might end up importing foreign influences from South Asia and the Middle East, where the mood is generally anti-Western and the environment is unstable. Melanie Phillips, in her book *Londonistan*, describes fears of these connections inflaming sentiments in the UK.<sup>246</sup>

(2) Opposition from Segments of Muslim Youth: Older Muslims, especially those who belong to the second and third generations living in the UK, might find family bonds too restrictive on their freedom. The generation gap

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<sup>246</sup> Melanie Phillips, *Londonistan* (London: Encounter Books, 2006), 1-18.

between these young kids and their parents might also hinder any move toward making the family a building block of Muslim society. Most second and third generation Muslim children also look at their forefathers' home country traditions as being too orthodox and restrictive. Consequently, a call to strengthen family traditions could aggravate the clash of values that already exists between parents and their British born children.

(3) Infeasible for Muslim Parents: Most Muslim families belong to the lower or lower middle class. In such cases both husbands and wives are working, often at odd times. Parents in such families are so preoccupied with trying to make ends meet that it would be very difficult for them to spare some time for themselves and family—for them this would be too great a luxury.

### **3. Constructing Suitable Narratives**

To propagate an innovation requires a suitable narrative. The most complex aspect of a De-radicalization Campaign is to write or contextualize the narrative for of our innovation. This involves constructing meta-narratives, which act as over-arching big themes that set the parameters for “stories” to be told at individual, local, and community levels.

#### ***a. Meta-Narrative***

An example of a meta-narrative for strengthening family would be something like this:

Forced marriages, drugs and criminality, employment issues, racism, political representation, faith, freedom, along with the notion of home and belonging are some of the problem areas that pop up frequently whenever one discusses the predicaments of young British-born Muslims. To overcome these problems Muslims need to not only maintain their distinct identity, but to project themselves as useful members of broader society. However, in order to ensure that members of the younger generation follow a more progressive path, do not get absorbed or seduced by the artificial appeal of the West, and become better human beings in terms of this world and the world to come, they must be plugged back into old, forgotten



traditional family values. British Muslims need a system that insulates their children from the wrong influences of society and provides them the warmth they long for in an environment in which they often feel alienated. Their family *is* their strength. Just as the strength of a building depends on its foundation, if the foundation is weak the building is going to crumble. Likewise, the Muslim community's foundation rests on the family system, a home life, on how parents bring up their children, and on how connected parents and children stay throughout their lives.

#### ***b. Operationalizing the Meta-Narrative***

The application of a meta-narrative demands construction of many small narratives, which is a long term process. At this point it might not be possible to correctly project how the “family” innovation might be received. However, some major sub-narratives can be identified, and these could be emphasized as areas to work on: for instance, the quality of family support, cohesion—commitment of family members to one another, expressiveness—the degree to which family members act openly and express feelings, conflict mitigation—addressing disparities among and between members of the family, transmission of ethical standards from parents to children, daughters' close positive relationship with their mothers, other relatives' influence during adolescence, etc.

### **4. Spreading the Idea of Strengthening the Family System**

#### ***a. Law of the Few***

What social infrastructure would be useful for propagating the revival of families? The main sub-question here is: Should we look for new “influentials” in the community or are they already present?

The argument can be made that due to the non-theological character of our innovation we would not require an alternative community through which to spread our ideas. It must be remembered, in a system with traditional norms the opinion leaders who favor old traditions are always present.

This increases the probability of finding enough “influentials” who would carry the new “family” message. These persons can effectively spread our message through their social networks.

(1) **Mavens:** As already stated, the Mavens are the data banks, they are information specialists who are readily available to assist people with information sharing. However, unlike ideas pertaining to religion where the numbers of qualified people are limited, those knowledgeable about social themes like “family” should know no such limits. As far as the issue of finding them is concerned, we must look for these individuals in two different age groups: older people who enjoy respect and credibility within the older generation, and younger people, who are essentially British-born Muslims and viewed as successful. The message can also be propagated through religious channels since Islam places great importance on family values. Mavens should be identified from many different walks of lives. These could be journalists, social workers, imams, school teachers, or normal people who have communication skills to convey their point of view effectively. Social networks should be used for identifying such experts.

(2) **Connectors:** Connectors are people with a special gift for bringing the world together.<sup>247</sup> They are not particular or choosy about information and enjoy passing on to others anything they find interesting. They are people who naturally occupy the hubs in multiple societal networks. In the case of “family” as an innovation, we do not require any separate set of Connectors. Connectors are especially important during the initial stages of introducing an innovation. However, Connectors merely pass along the information and make people aware of new ideas. They have no monopoly over persuasion.

(3) **Salesmen:** The Salesmen’s role will be the most critical. Salesmen help reduce uncertainty about an innovation. These individuals must be clear in their own minds about what goals lie behind adoption of the

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<sup>247</sup> Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 38.

innovation. Unlike Connectors who mostly help with propagating information, Salesmen are practitioners of innovation. Much of their credibility rests in their actions. Thus, to persuade people to adopt family values, Salesmen must show people the practicability and usefulness of adopting this innovation. They must walk the walk and not just talk the talk. The Islamists' persuasion techniques described in Chapters III and IV could be intelligently tailored for the new "family" message.

***b. Stickiness Factor***

Likewise, the factors explained by the Heaths (see Chapter IV) can be intelligently applied to make the "family" message stickier.

For instance, the ideas that we devise to persuade people to stand behind our notion of strengthening families as a counter-radicalization tool would likely be more effective if the ideas were transmitted in language that resonates with the experiences of Muslims in the UK. In order to help an innovation take off, or tip, the ideas have to be engineered to appeal to both elders and members of the younger generation simultaneously. This is going to be a tough task. Old values will be acceptable to the elders if these sufficiently reflect older cultural traditions; yet for these to attract the attention of the younger population the ideas will have to be tailored creatively for today.

Another aspect that deserves consideration when creating stickiness in messages is the issue of sustainability. In order to reach a point that the new idea becomes institutionalized, an innovation should be open to modification to fit a wide range of conditions. Therefore, we should expect to change the tone of our messages as behavior gradually changes.

***c. Power of Context***

People are usually attracted to an innovation when they feel the need for a new alternative. This means creating awareness among people that it

is in their interest to seek a stronger family system, given the dissatisfying environment in which they find themselves.

The psychological scars of racialism and disenfranchisement may take a long time to fade away in the Muslim community. But interestingly, this should help the acceptance of our innovation by providing the proper context. Under threatened and strained conditions, it is going to be easier to propagate counter-radicalization messages by stressing the need to pull together and look within, which is what a return to family offers.

Nevertheless, overnight changes should not be expected. Ideally, family control over younger generations can, in the short term, slow down the process of radicalization. By reshaping the environment in this way, the plan would be to continue to steer Muslim society away from the Islamists' path.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I have talked about one possible de-radicalization campaign. I have suggested that instead of countering theological ideas, the campaign should draw its strengths from ideas that are non-theological in character, yet can under-cut the Islamists' activism. This chapter has discussed the strengths and potential pitfalls of this argument and advises that strengthening "family" could be ideal for executing a de-radicalization campaign. The family environment significantly determines children's social development. During this period, when events in the wider world are bound to continue to provoke a sense of moral outrage at apparent injustices against Muslims, and when there is unprecedented media influence on adolescent identity, it is very important not to lose sight of the significance of family as an indirect tool for reversing the process of radicalization among Muslim diasporas in the UK.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The terrorist threat to the UK is not new; between 1969 and 1998 over 3,500 people died in the UK itself as a result of Irish-related terrorism.<sup>248</sup> However, the recent spike of terrorism is quite different. On the one hand, it is linked to international terrorism and different militant groups spread throughout the Muslim world. On the other hand, there is a domestic and home-grown aspect to this terrorism as well.

Indeed, what is unique is the unforeseen merger of these two types of terrorism. If, in the international realm, Muslims see Westerners' policies as anti-Muslim and feel humiliated, this is also true domestically in the UK, where Muslim diasporas still face the reality of racialism and disenfranchisement. What the British face is undoubtedly a domestic predicament. I do not dispute the fact that there may be involvement by elements of al-Qaeda, but I feel that it would be a mistake to plan counter-actions exclusively focused on externalizing the threat. Only by also focusing on the sense of exclusion by British society of Muslims can a de-radicalization campaign succeed.

Recently, the UK Government has revised and issued a detailed counter-terrorism strategy named "CONTEST." This strategy has been organized around four themes: pursue, prevent, protect, and prepare. This thesis has concentrated on one of these themes: prevent. My approach, however, has been fundamentally different from that of the British government. Instead of preventing terrorism from happening, I have proposed reversing the radicalization process itself. At the core of this phenomenon of terrorism is diffusion of an innovation that sets up a real contest for anyone trying to stem the tide.

The radicalization that Muslim diasporas in the UK experience today follows a distinct pattern. As we have seen, it can be understood by applying the *Strain Theory*, *Resource Mobilization Theory*, and *Framing Theory*. It would not

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<sup>248</sup> The Home Office UK, "The UK's Strategy for Countering International Terrorists," 20.

be incorrect to dub what the Islamists have achieved an innovation. That is why this thesis has argued that the best course of action for de-radicalizing British Muslims is to go well beyond employing prevention strategies; these are important, but far from sufficient. To trigger de-radicalization we must initiate “replacement discontinuance.” This will encourage Muslims to seek a better alternative. Successful construction of the “need” for an alternative will automatically call for new ideas, which we can plan to proliferate through interpersonal interaction and word-of-mouth communications.

Muslims in the UK are experiencing a youth bulge. Muslim adolescents are as idealistic as any youth should be. Our purpose here should be to rechannel their passion by introducing them to new ideas and ways of thinking, thus making them better “Britons.”

There are positive indicators coming from Muslims living in the UK, a majority of whom strongly oppose radicalization and espouse moderate religious views. However, younger Muslims in this diaspora feel alienated, marginalized, and excluded from mainstream British society. Such feelings will always keep them vulnerable to recruitment and subsequent radicalization.

At present, any effort to innovate religious thoughts is likely to be seen as a *bid'ah* and will fail. Hence, in order to counter the radicalization process I have suggested a reorientation or paradigm shift. Instead of contesting the Islamists on theological grounds, I have proposed emphasizing the reinvigoration of “family” as a counter-radicalization tool. By pursuing this strategy, the UK government would avoid direct confrontation with Islamists on religious grounds. What the government instead would introduce is a small change that no theologian could argue against. In one package, we could remove social strains, hamper Islamists’ mobilization mechanisms, and trump their methods of message propagation techniques based on familiarity and word-of-mouth persuasion.

I have proposed spreading this new “family” innovation employing their same strategies. Gladwell’s triple laws would provide one effective way to diffuse such an innovation. Though the innovation is non-theological, it still can be supported by religious figures. The non-religious, but Islam-oriented nature of Muslim families lends this innovation an incontestable stature and significance. It also enables us to make full use of existing social networks. The thing that must be kept in mind is that instead of only mosques, centers of critical activity would be shifted to also include homes and schools.

Parents and teachers should play a greater role in winning back the younger generation from Islamist activism. Involvement of as many adults as possible is important for two reasons: first, so that they can support one another; there is always strength in numbers; second, the aim is not to pit *some* adults against alienated and radicalizable youth. Instead, it is to embed all young people in networks of concerned and caring, but also proud and Islam-oriented Britons and to channel them in a positive direction.

Whether “family” is *the* innovation that can best serve counter-radicalization is clearly a matter of debate. How to implement the innovation deserves further study. There are many areas related to this thesis that can be explored further. Others areas I would suggest for further research and discussion are: narrative framing and the dynamic involved in adopting messages to a shifting environment as social change is under way.

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## APPENDIX. ISLAM ON CAMPUS: A SURVEY OF UK STUDENT OPINIONS (EXTRACTS)<sup>249</sup>

Ser No	Questions	Details	Total	Male	Female
			632	297	335
			%	%	%
1	Are you member of your university's Islamic Society?	Yes	25	24	25
		No	65	64	66
		N/A University does not have an Islamic Society	10	12	9
2	How active would you say you are in the Islamic Society?	I'm committee member	8	7	9
		Very active	10	12	9
		Fairly active	27	25	29
		Not very active	55	57	53
3	Do you tend to think of Islam as a religion or a way of life?	A religion	13	13	14
		A way of life	30	33	28
		Both	52	48	55
		Not sure	5	6	4
4	How often, if it all, do you visit the campus prayer room at your university?	At least once a day	17	20	15
		Between two and five times a week	10	8	11
		About once or twice a month	8	12	5
		Less than once a month	6	9	3
		I have never visited the campus prayer room	8	8	8
		N/A	51	42	58
5	Which, if any, of the following statements comes closer to your views?	Islam is a religion whilst Islamist is a political ideology	36	35	36
		They are both part of the same thing	16	18	14
		Neither of these	22	21	23
		Not sure	27	26	28

<sup>249</sup> "Islam on Campus: A survey of UK Student Opinions," [http://www.socialcohesion.co.uk/files/1231525079\\_1.pdf](http://www.socialcohesion.co.uk/files/1231525079_1.pdf) (accessed January 7, 2009).

Ser No	Questions	Details	Total	Male	Female
			632	297	335
			%	%	%
6	How supportive would you be of the establishment of the Islamic political party to represent the views of Muslims at Parliament?	Very supportive	28	32	25
		Fairly supportive	26	24	27
		Not very supportive	14	14	14
		Not at all supportive	10	10	11
		Not sure	22	21	23
7	How would you describe that difference?	My parents are much more strict Muslims than me	40	45	35
		My parents are slightly more strict Muslims than I am	33	32	34
		My parents are slightly more liberal Muslims than I am	14	9	17
		My parents are much more liberal Muslims than I am	4	7	1
		Not sure	10	7	12
8	Do you consider Sufism to be ...?	Based on the Quran and Sunnah	19	21	18
		Not based on the Quran or Sunnah	18	19	16
		Neither of these	9	10	9
		Not sure	54	50	57
9	Do you consider Sufism to be ...?	An ancient Islamic practice	21	21	20
		Developed under Greek and Hindu influence	10	12	9
		Both of these	6	7	4
		Neither of these	11	12	10
		Not sure	53	48	57
10	Can we interpret Shariah depending upon time and place	Yes	39	37	40
		No	25	24	26
		Not sure	36	39	34
11	Does Islam tend to allow or prohibit interpretation of Shariah	Tend to allow	24	27	21
		Tend to prohibit	16	17	16
		Quran makes no reference	10	9	11
		Not sure	50	47	53

Ser No	Questions	Details	Total	Male	Female
			632	297	335
			%	%	%
12	To what an extent if at all you consider yourself to be a British?	I am British	62	63	61
		Partially British	21	16	25
		I am not British	12	14	10
		Not sure	5	7	4
13	Do you think its possible to be both Muslim and British equally?	Yes	78	74	81
		No, being British comes first	3	3	3
		No, being Muslim comes first	12	16	10
		Not sure	7	8	6
14	Is Islam compatible with Western notions of democracy?	Very compatible	29	34	26
		Fairly compatible	39	37	40
		Fairly incompatible	8	7	10
		Very incompatible	5	6	4
		Not sure	19	17	21
15	Are you supportive of Caliphate based on Shariah Law?	Very supported	15	16	15
		Fairly supportive	18	20	16
		Not very supportive	12	11	14
		Not at all supportive	13	15	12
		Not sure	41	39	44
16	How important to Islam do you think it is that Muslim women wear the hijab?	Very important	30	26	34
		Fairly important	29	30	28
		Not very important	19	20	18
		Not at all important	12	11	14
		Not sure	10	13	7
17	Which of the following statements comes closer to your view?	Women should wear the hijab	31	30	31
		It is up to the individual Muslim woman as to whether or not she chooses to wear hijab	61	58	64
		Not sure	8	12	5
18	Do you believe that men and women should be treated equally?	Yes, they should	89	88	91
		No they should not	5	4	5
		Not sure	6	8	4

Ser No	Questions	Details	Total	Male	Female
			632	297	335
			%	%	%
19	Is it ever justifiable to kill in the name of religion?	Yes, to preserve religion	4	3	4
		Yes, if religion is under attack	28	32	24
		No, not justified	53	46	59
		Not sure	15	19	13
20	How has the British public reaction to the war in Iraq affected the amount of respect you have for British society?	My respect increased	30	32	27
		My respect decreased	20	20	19
		No change: I respect British society anyway	26	24	28
		No change: I didn't respect British society anyway	3	2	4
		Not sure	21	21	22
21	Where would you like to settle down for work?	UK	70	67	72
		Middle East	4	4	4
		Asia	3	3	2
		Europe – excl UK	3	3	2
		USA	4	3	4
		Others	16	20	16

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